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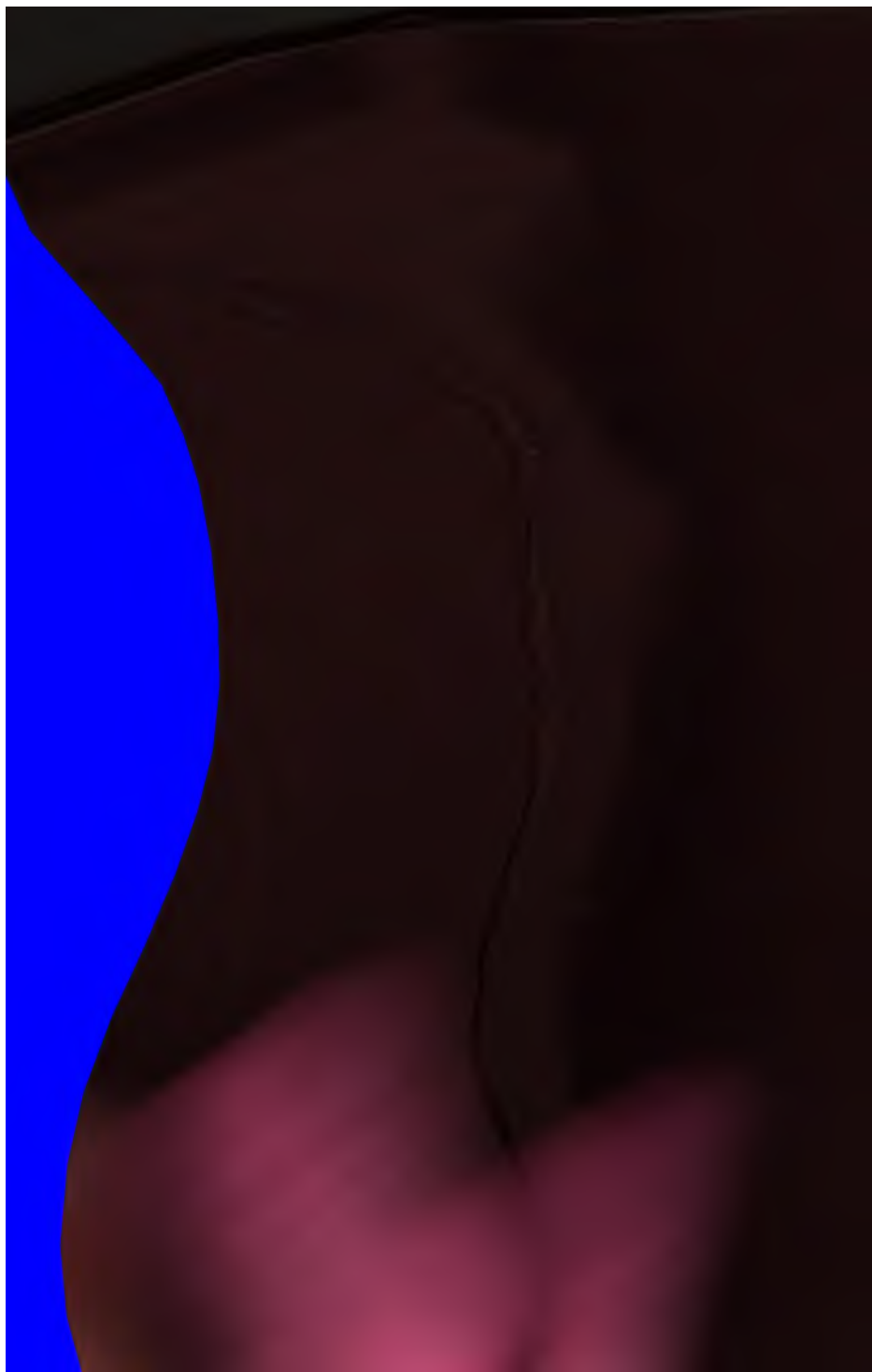
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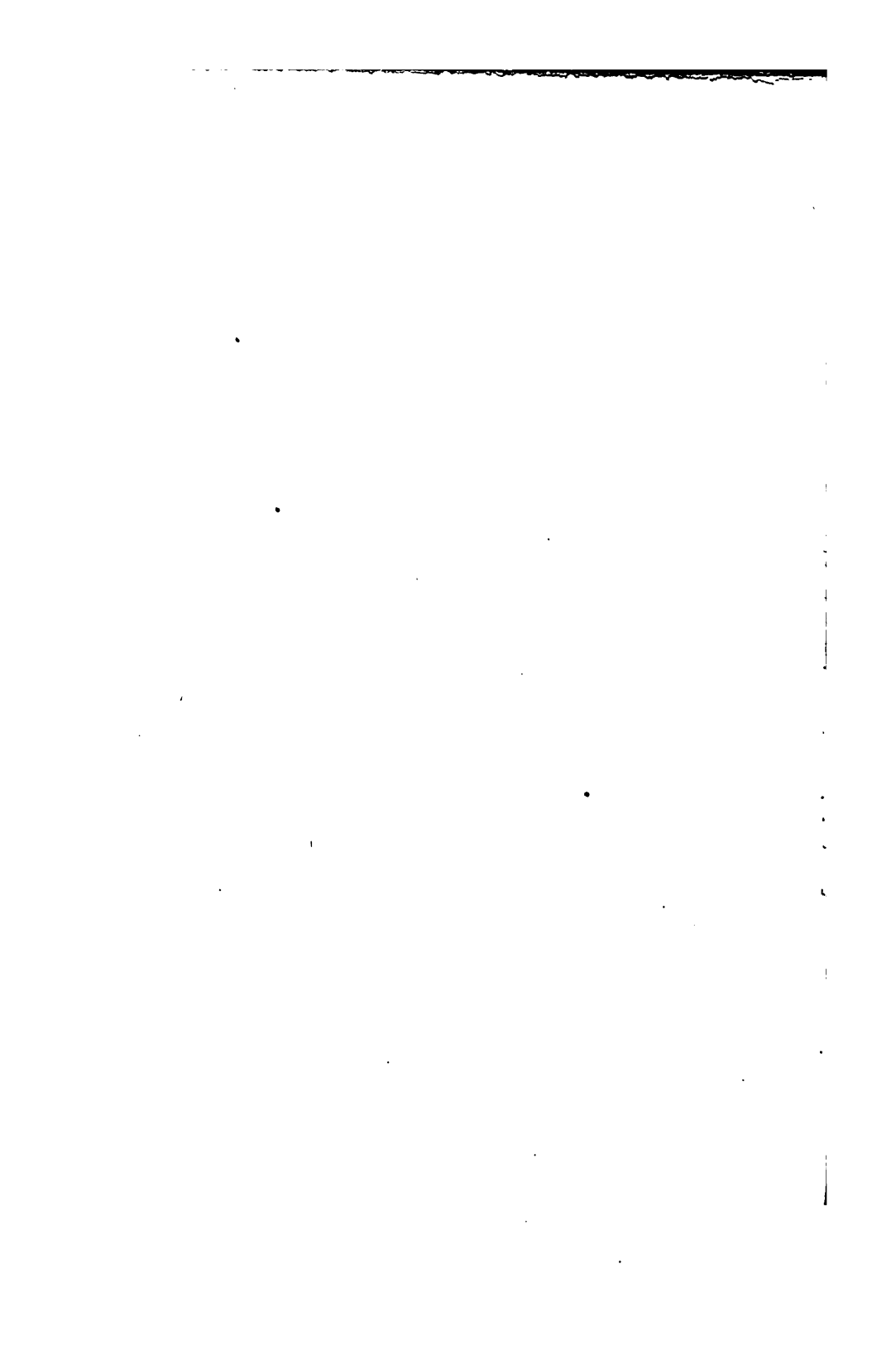




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1840

COURT LIFE AT NAPLES

IN OUR OWN TIMES

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“LA CAVA; OR, RECOLLECTIONS OF THE NEAPOLITANS”

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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COURT LIFE AT NAPLES.

CHAPTER I.

THE large ball-room was rapidly emptying, as prudent mammas carried off reluctant daughters, whose towzled dresses, disordered hair, and heavy eyelids bore witness, however, to the wisdom of the measure. Most of the English and other well-regulated families had departed, leaving the greater space for the remaining dancers, who were now busily preparing for the interminable cotillon, and hunting out chairs from every available nook and corner. Dancers' feet and orchestras' lungs are never supposed to know the meaning of fatigue, and on this occasion both were prepared to continue their hard work with astonishing perseverance.

A party of English naval officers were lounging half wearily on the royal couches, eyeing these proceedings with far from smiling countenances, and relieving themselves occasionally by tremendous yawns.

These gallant gentlemen had certainly no very great reason to be satisfied with the night's entertainment. There had been few dancers present among their own countrywomen, and Neapolitan ladies and those of other

nations had not looked kindly upon them. Those who *had* danced had found great difficulty in procuring *vis-à-vis*, every one they asked being provided with this necessity; and Mr. Russell, amongst others, had even been obliged to sit down with his disappointed partner, as not one of the native couples had been willing to stand opposite to them for the short space of twenty minutes!

"I say, Jeffrey, I call this deuced slow work, 'coldly correct and classically dull.' What are we waiting for, eh?"

"Partners, perhaps," answered Mr. Jeffrey with one of a series of dislocating yawns.

"Well, I wish we may get them, that's all!" said Mr. Russell, who was decidedly crusty.

"Just my own sentiment, my fine fellow, and so I intend to try."

"I should so like to have a turn with one of these Neapolitans — they dance splendidly!" sighed Johnson, an overgrown middy.

"It *is* hard," said Russell; "but they look at a fellow as if they could eat him up without pepper or salt!"

"There's little Sefton in a front row opposite; she's been squinting at us for ever so long," remarked the gallant Mr. Jeffrey. "She'll do for want of a better; but then she's only one — shall we draw lots?"

"Many thanks," answered Russell, "you are quite welcome to *my* share; she almost drags a man's arm off!"

"Then she won't suit *you*, youngster," to the middy, who looked half affronted; "and as Russell declares off, and Herbert is half asleep, I will take pity on the forlorn damsel. I can try a turn or two with these *sauerkraut* Neapolitans in the cotillon, and then I shall be able to tell you, Johnson, how they dance."

"Better have nothing to do with them, Jeffrey; they'll refuse you — see if they don't."

"'Faint heart never won fair lady,' so here goes for little Sefton to begin with."

At that instant the Contessa di Malafede passed, and returned Mr. Russell's salutation with a smile.

"Who is your friend?" inquired the sprightly Mr. Jeffrey.

Russell told him.

"Ah! *She* looks as if she could waltz, so I'll keep an eye upon her; besides, being English, she won't be glum when a handsome young fellow asks her to dance!"

And off went Mr. Jeffrey to gladden the heart of Miss Sefton by engaging her for the cotillon, while his companions arranged themselves comfortably on their splendid seats to watch the dancers.

"Are you not going to dance, Helen?" inquired the Contessa of the latter, who sat on one of the raised benches looking weary and pale.

"No, I am too tired. I want to go home, but my husband has engaged a partner, and therefore I must wait awhile. And you?"

"Oh! I have promised Baron Torlone to remain a tiny bit longer and join the cotillon ——"

"Oh! Louisa, put him off — make some excuse, I entreat!" And Helen rose in her eagerness, and laid one little hand on the other's arm.

"Mais pourquoi, chère amie? I am not very tired, and besides I shall stay but a short time."

"Dear Louisa, I cannot speak here; but let me see you to-morrow morning, and I will explain clearly. Only do not dance any more with that man, I beseech you ——"

"Madame la Comtesse, on va commencer," and the

Baron carried off his partner ere she had time to question Helen as to her mysterious behaviour.

The latter resumed her seat, chagrined at the unsuccessful result of her interference, and wondering what construction the Contessa would put upon it; but the latter, in the giddy mazes of the cotillon in which she had a first-rate partner, soon forgot the subject entirely.

The figure termed *les Fleurs*, which always takes the lead at Naples, was succeeded by another, the name of which is unknown to us, but wherein the ladies stand in rows of four or five deep, leaving a space between, through which the gentlemen wind. These place themselves behind each row of belles, who, on a signal, turn round, and every lady dances with the partner that happens to be immediately in her rear. This figure was several times repeated, and Mr. Jeffrey found himself amongst the last batch of *figuranti*.

Chance gratified his wishes by stationing him behind the Contessa, who, on turning round, found a smiling young English officer, clad in his handsome uniform, allotted to her. There was a minute's delay to allow the other couples to move, when, just as Mr. Jeffrey was preparing to start with his fair prize, he was rudely hustled on one side, and his partner whirled off, by a bearded Neapolitan, who darted a fiery look of hate at the Englishman as he departed.

Louisa and the Baron both laughed on noticing the astonished air of the defrauded sailor, while the lady congratulated herself on having a better dancer than she had expected, and thought the whole proceeding very amusing.

Ladies often treat such events in the same foolish way, regardless of consequences; but the Baron, after having gratified his spite towards the detested British uniform,

remembered the look which had flushed the officer's face; and, truth to say, this memory was by no means quieting to his peace of mind!

Jeffrey's companions witnessed the whole, and great was their indignation; but the victim himself, after standing for an instant spell-bound in the centre of the waltz, pushed against by countless couples whose progress he impeded, returned to Miss Sefton's side, with no greater change of countenance than a tightening of the lips, and being a shade paler than before.

Shortly after, as the Baron and the Contessa were regaining their seats, the former felt a light touch on his arm, and turning, met the gaze of a pair of gleaming eyes. A whisper followed, low but clear—

“Dans une heure, au Café de l'Europe.”

The speaker departed just as Louisa, finding her partner stop, sought to discover the cause, saw the Englishman's eyes, caught his words, and instantly divined the probable consequences of the Baron's escapade.

Terrified almost to death, she became ashy pale; and feeling the room, dancers, lights, all swimming round in her bewildered brain, she feebly requested the Baron to conduct her to the cooler anteroom. He did so, with earnest expressions of sympathy at her indisposition, and their departure was unnoticed by the rest of the dancers. The fresher atmosphere brought back a little colour to her cheeks, and perceiving that he might safely leave her alone for an instant, the Baron said he would fetch her a glass of water, and started on his errand.

At that late hour refreshments were not easily to be had; and as the Baron was obliged first to find an attendant, and afterwards to descend some back-stairs with him to see if any water remained in the room where

ices and other supplies were reserved, he was absent for some little time.

Louisa stayed in the cool anteroom, seated near the centre door of communication with the great salon. Inside the latter, but leaning against the door-posts, so that every word uttered was clearly audible to the Contessa, who was herself unseen, stood two Frenchmen, talking together at railroad speed, as all Frenchmen do.

In her first sickness and confusion, her thoughts were too scared to attend to their conversation. She now saw that she ought not to have suffered the Baron to tear her from the Englishman, whose perfect right it was to waltz with her in the cotillon. She had acted wrongly, and, like a consenting party, though, in truth, she had been whirled away too rapidly to afford her time for remonstrance, had she thought of offering it, which she *had not*. The officer must be justly indignant. And why would not the Baron let her dance with him? His interference was an impertinence certainly. Would it entail a duel? What other meaning could be attached to the appointment at the Café de l'Europe? What ought she to do? How should she avert it?

These thoughts succeeded each other in less time than it has taken to read them; but at this instant a name uttered in a voice which she recognised as that of an acquaintance attracted her attention, and the succeeding words riveted it to the conversation of the gentlemen before alluded to.

"C'est un bien mauvais sujet que ce Baron Torlone, et c'est moi qui vous le dis!"

"Mais, mon cher, que voulez-vous? Lorsqu'une dame lui donne des gages d'amour, on sait bien ce que ça veut dire! Ma foi! elle est jolie cette Comtesse de

Malafede; j'aimerais bien qu'elle me donnât de ses gants à moi aussi!"

"Dites donc, vous les a-t-il montrés?"

"Assurément: nous étions réunis au Palais Berio — Giulio, Castelbianco, et d'autres — lorsque Torlone nous fit voir ce joli petit gant de Madame la Comtesse ——"

They moved away. She heard no more, but sat motionless, conscious only of the burning thought that her name was the scoff of the town! She saw it all now: the glove was the one she had dropped into the Lake of Fusaro; Castelbianco had seen it — had told Helen, and this was the cause of the latter's strange behaviour that very evening. Then this — she knew not what to call the man, he was something so vile, so base in her eyes — he would drag her name into a duel; his adversary would deem her a worthless thing; and her husband, was *he* aware of this plot? He valued her person little enough, but his honour, perchance, more! Should she tell him? She ought to, but how would he act?

Suddenly she started up. The Baron had gone for some water, he said; he must not find her there; she would go home. Ah! what a dreary, lonely home it was. And a few scalding tears of pain and mortification trickled slowly down her cheeks for the first time; but she wiped them hastily, almost angrily, away.

At that instant the Castelbiancos entered the ante-room on their way out.

"Oh! Helen dear, take me home — quick. I don't want to meet that man again. I shall be safer with you. Let me go in your carriage!"

"Certainly, if you wish it." And seeing that Louisa tottered, Helen made her lean upon her, asking no ques-

tions, irritating her with no remarks. Her husband went to fetch their cloaks, but the Contessa would not wait, and hurried Helen down the first flight of marble steps to the cloak-room.

They were quickly ready, and Castelbianco had gone on to have their carriage summoned, when they heard rapid steps following them through the long corridor. Helen's heart beat rather faster, and she stole a glance at her companion's face: it grew suddenly calm, and her step became firm as she drew up her fine figure to its full height.

"Mais, Madame la Comtesse," exclaimed an eager, reproachful voice, "I have been seeking you everywhere. How cruel to leave me thus! See, here is the water; but you are better? Ah! what a relief to my heart."

"Monsieur le Baron," she answered in calm, clear tones, "our acquaintance is at an end. I can hold no intercourse with one who first steals ladies' gloves, and then dares exhibit them to the world as free gifts!"

The craven absolutely quailed beneath the scorn darting from those bright, flashing eyes.

"Je vous jure, Madame——"

"Pas un mot, Monsieur, to-morrow you will restore me my glove;" and she swept past him imperiously, as Castelbianco half opened one of the red cloth portals, and beckoned them to hasten their steps.

A whisper from Helen stayed him from accompanying them in the carriage, and when the door was banged to, and the horses were fairly in motion, then, and not till then, Louisa's o'erwrought feelings gave way. Laying her head, like a wearied child, on Helen's sympathising bosom, she gave vent to a violent burst of hysteric tears

that shook the slender form and pitying arms that circled her.

"Shall I go up stairs with you now?" whispered Helen, as the carriage stopped.

"No, no, I am better now, but to-morrow."

"Yes, I will come to you early," and with a warm, tender embrace, they parted.

CHAPTER II.

"HENRI," said Baron Torlone, as he took the arm of a tall, moustachioed Swiss *capitaine d'infanterie* on issuing from the ball into the silent, deserted street, "Henri, you lost some ducats to-day at billiards?"

"Oui, diable! Luck has forsaken me for the last week."

"Will you accept sixteen? They are at your service," and opening his Spanish *capa*, the Neapolitan cautiously showed the glittering silver to his powerful companion by the light of a gas lamp.

The Swiss saw the sparkle for a minute, and heard the musical chink, but the next instant the cloak concealed the coveted treasure.

"Parbleu, mon cher, but you are an excellent fellow! I am truly grateful and quite willing."

"Doucement — piano, piano, amico mio! You must hear me first."

After a moment's silence the Baron continued:

"Il fatto sta che uno di que' bricconi d'ufficiali Inglesi wishes to pick a quarrel with, and challenge me. Per Bacco! ho tutta la buona volontà, and my fingers itch to give lo scellerato a good spadacciata, ma — ma — I am *en parole!*"

"Ah!" and the Swiss gave a long, low whistle, and twirled the ends of his light moustaches, which so

incensed the Neapolitan, that he muttered something that shall be nameless. Still, as the soldier said no more, but waited for further information, the Baron felt that he must descend to particulars. You perceive, *mon cher*, how I am placed : if I *do* fight this *vigliaccio* the galleys will be my portion, and if I don't——”

“Ah! justement—et puis?” and the Swiss gave a short laugh, that made even the Neapolitan flush : he replied rather sharply,

“You are in immediate want of money : there is some at your disposal, a free gift, if you will render me this service?”

“Then I run no risk of exchanging a scarlet coat for a convict's jacket—eh, *mon cher*?” and another little laugh followed which made his companion actually tremble with rage. However the latter dissembled his feelings, and during the half hour's walk which ensued under the colonnade fronting the church of S. Francesco di Paolo, the affair was settled satisfactorily to both parties. When they parted, at the end of that time, the sixteen ducats had changed hands, and as Baron Torlone hurried towards the Toledo, his companion approached the Caffè d'Europa, where a few feeble lights still lingered.

Entering with head erect, and imposing military air, the soldier perceived two young English naval officers seated at a side table.

One of them was comforting the inner man, and whiling away time by drinking something which he examined scientifically at every sip. Holding his glass on high between finger and thumb, and closing one eye, he squinted at the mixture with the other ; a process commonly followed by a sniff, and the exclamations of “vile stuff! horrid mess!” &c.

His companion, resting his elbows on the soiled marble table, with interlaced fingers supporting his chin, maintained a moody silence which his knitted brows told clearly boded no good to some person or persons unknown.

Advancing to this pair, the Swiss politely lifted his hat and introduced himself as le Baron de Bonmarché. The Englishmen rose, and after returning his salutation with equal courtesy, Lieutenant Herbert — *he* who had scrutinized his wine-glass so narrowly — inquired if he had come from the Barone Torlone?

“C’est ça, Messieurs.”

“He is prepared, I conclude, to offer an ample apology?”

“I tell you, Herbert, I’ll have none of his cowardly apologising,” growled out his friend.

“Now do be quiet, there’s a good fellow, and leave me to settle this business! Monsieur (turning to the Baron), I propose our retiring to a private room, where we shall not be interrupted, and where we shall doubtless agree satisfactorily on all points?”

“Je suis à votre disposition, Monsieur,” with a stately bow.

“Jeffrey, don’t get yourself into another scrape while I am away, that’s all!” and after prolonged *boo-ing*, as the Scotch have it, neither gentleman being willing to take precedence of the other, the difficulty was amicably settled by their passing through the doorway side by side.

“Asseyez-vous, Monsieur,” said the polite Lieutenant, first presenting a chair to the Baron, and then seating himself opposite to him. “May I repeat my former question? — have you brought an apology for the gross affront to which my friend has been subjected?”

"Non, Monsieur; Baron Torlone will not apologise, it would be beneath his dignity."

"His *dignity*—ah! Then Monsieur le Baron, I conclude there will be nothing further to be done beyond settling preliminaries for a meeting?"

"Exactement: seulement, Monsieur, I must explain that I offer myself as the adversary of Monsieur—Monsieur——?"

"Monsieur Jeffrey, Lieutenant de la frégate 'Lightning' dans le service de Sa Majesté Britannique."

The Swiss bowed.

"I offer myself as Monsieur Jeffrey's opponent."

"*You?* But my friend has happily no little affair to arrange with Monsieur!"

"No; but Baron Torlone is prevented, malheureusement, from following his own inclinations, and I offer myself in his place."

"Indeed! And why cannot Baron Torlone fight his own battles, when he is so ready to provide reasons for such rencontres?"

"Parce que, Monsieur, il est *en parole*."

"Which means that he can insult a gentleman and then refuse to grant him satisfaction?"

The Swiss altered his posture slightly, by crossing his right leg over the left, instead of his previous position, wherein the *left* limb crossed the right.

"Monsieur, I am ready to offer Monsieur Jeffrey *every* satisfaction—the affair may be settled in this very room with swords."

"I cannot allow my friend to accept any such proposition; it is quite incompatible with our English ideas! The affair lies between him and Baron Torlone, and if the latter shrinks from his own obligations, and at the same time refuses to apologise, Monsieur, as a

gentleman and a noble, is aware of the construction that we *must* put on his extraordinary behaviour."

The Swiss fidgetted a little uneasily in his chair, and at the same moment the door opened and Lieutenant Jeffrey himself appeared.

"Really, Herbert, I can't stand such dawdling any longer; you might have arranged fifty duels comfortably in the time it has taken you to settle this one! When and where's it to be? The sooner the better, I say."

"The truth is, old fellow," and the shadow of a smile fluttered round Mr. Herbert's mouth, "that your friend will neither apologise nor show fight, and has sent Monsieur le Baron here, as his substitute; but as you gave me *carte blanche* to arrange everything, I have just explained to Monsieur that any such crooked piece of business is quite out of the question."

"And so the cowardly rascal won't fight, eh?" and a grim smile curled the young man's lip.

Again the Baron fidgetted, and rising from his chair interposed.

"Monsieur, I have undertaken this little matter for my friend, and am ready to fight with swords when and where you like!"

"But my quarrel is not with Monsieur!"

"Regard *me* as thè Baron Torlone."

"Excuse me, but I should be sorry to regard any brave soldier as standing in his dirty shoes! No, Monsieur le Baron, you as a gentleman must see the case in its true light, and confess that if that — if Baron Torlone will neither meet me nor apologise, I shall have every right to proclaim his character to the world, which I shall most certainly take care to do! As to the Baron Bonmarché, I desire *not* his *life*, but

his acquaintance," and the sailor frankly held out his hand, which the other grasped and shook warmly.

"Monsieur," he said, "I confess to you that this is an ugly business, and one which I by no means liked undertaking; however I cannot well discuss it, though I trust it need not interfere with the *amitié* and *considération* each of us will entertain for the other in future."

And then followed more bows and smiles; and daylight peeping through the closed blinds shortly after; saw the trio amicably seated together round a table discussing the "vile stuff—horrid mess" which Lieutenant Herbert had previously condemned so forcibly.

Truth to say, when "the wine was in," Baron Bonmarché no longer hesitated to denounce his dear friend and brother Baron as he deserved, and moreover disclosed the little circumstance about the ducats, without calculating how much it might redound to his own credit, or *vice versa*!

CHAPTER III.

"HAVE you seen him to-day?" asked Helen of the Contessa, as the two ladies sat in the boudoir of the latter, the morning after the ball.

"Yes, dear, there was no help for it. He brought the glove, and I was thankful to get it from him at the price of meeting him a final time."

"How did he behave?"

"At first he enacted the injured innocent, but finding that made no impression, he broke into the greatest insolence and even threatened to make both me and my husband suffer for my behaviour towards him! I had secured my unlucky glove, and therefore made no other reply than by walking out of the room."

"Ah!" said Helen, "Baron Torlone visited me likewise, and though I have latterly given especial orders to be denied to him, he forced his way into my presence, and addressed me as if we were the best friends possible; but as he entered by one door I quitted the room by an opposite one!"

"Truly, 'a man may smile and smile and be a villain!'" exclaimed Louisa bitterly. "Have you heard whether my folly in the cotillon has resulted in any meeting? The Englishman's countenance quite frightened me, he looked so incensed; but I forgot all in my own after-excitement."

"Do not fear; Mr. Jeffrey did indeed seek an interview with the Baron, but the latter had not the courage to meet him — so Gaetano told me this morning. Mr. Jeffrey intends posting him everywhere."

"The base coward!" exclaimed Louisa. "He well deserves it, though Neapolitans will never care for such a trifle; they will receive him as before. So long as he can dance and sing well they will require nothing else."

Louisa looked pale and careworn this morning, different to the brilliant beauty of last night's ball, and the dark rings which circled her saddened eyes betokened the anxiety she had undergone. Thoughtless and worldly as she was — following ever the impulse of the moment, without regard for the consequences that might attend her actions, or the habit of weighing and regulating her thoughts — it had still been to her a fearful shock to hear her name become, however erroneously, a byword in men's mouths. Her errors were not those of the heart, but arose from a faulty education. Taught from earliest youth to make one object — marriage — her only aim in life; feeling that her mother regarded her and her sisters in the light of burdens of which it was desirable to be rid as quickly as possible; she at first lent her aid to the scheming this necessitated, till the better feelings of her true nature cried aloud for sympathy, and twined themselves in all trust and devotion around the only heart that, she thought, had ever really loved her. How sincere that love was, time proved; and, alas! Louisa's heart had never been taught by herself or others to bear disappointments.

"For this whole life is full of miseries, signed on every side with crosses;

"But if thou trust in the Lord, fortitude shall be given thee from Heaven."

Who had ever bid her seek fortitude there where alone it is to be found? Truly, none had heard her complain; she was outwardly calm and smiling, so that some even called her stony-hearted, and others rejected the idea of any attachment having existed between Lieutenant Simpson and Miss Brown, else she could never have danced and flirted as gaily as before. But none knew of her sleepless nights of agony, when every fierce passion coursed unchecked through her mind — hate, revenge, despair — followed by a bitter pride and defiance of the faithless one's power over her heart! Ah! *this* was not fortitude, not the spirit in which one wrote:—

“Man must endure — let us *submit and pray!*”

but rather that of the world's tyrant:—

SEN. “Signor del mondo, a te che manca?”

NER.

“*Pace.*”

So, like many another despairing spirit, she had plunged recklessly into a marriage which now threatened to fill her cup of bitterness to overflowing, instead of affording her that refuge from herself — dreadful craving — which she had hoped for. The poor misguided spirit chafed and beat against its prison bars, and only bruised and tore itself more cruelly than before. There was

“No rest, no hope — yoked to a weary load,
To stern annoyances of petty strife
Which weary the worn spirit out of life.”

Oh! if she had known “the things which *belonged* unto *her* peace” — the true spirit of endurance which does not vainly battle against ills that *must* be borne, but rather bows itself to the very earth in self-abasement and humble submission to the will of God, “murmuring with lips in the dust: ‘Jesus! Jesus!’”

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"Have you told your husband?" inquired Helen after a pause.

"Oh! no," was the quick reply, as the Contessa suddenly roused herself from a reverie into which she had fallen. "He cares for little besides his books and snuff, and need never know of my *notoriety*."

"How so? There are always plenty of *kind friends* ready to impart information which had been better laid at rest for ever."

"Time enough to answer his questions when they are addressed to me! Be sure, Helen, it is matter of perfect indifference to him what amount of suffering or enjoyment falls to my lot. He has given me his name and provides me with food and clothing, which I have prepaid with fifteen thousand pounds; so that we are on equal terms.

"Do not talk so bitterly, dear Louisa; these are not the real feelings of your heart, and you know it. I am well aware how much you have been tried, but 'let the dead Past bury its dead,' and strive rather to improve the opportunities of happiness which your present life offers.

"*Happiness!*"

"Yes, happiness, I repeat it; the Count is a good and a clever man, which alone are advantages, are they not?" And Helen sighed involuntarily. "Recollect, he is much older than you, and if you evince no interest in his pursuits and occupations, is it likely that he will discard them entirely to share in your gaieties and lighter amusements?"

"Why did he marry me, then, if I am too young to be regarded as a rational being?"

"Louisa, Louisa, it is not that I mean! Remember that you never seek his advice or opinion on any matter;

that you leave him constantly alone at home while you enter society with which you can have little in common, I am certain ; and if you show the world your estimation of your husband by being always separate from him, can he be blind to the fact? Is this right? It is perhaps a liberty on my part," pursued Helen, noticing a gesture of impatience from her companion, "to address you thus openly ; but, dear Louisa, we have known each other as girls, and are now situated in our foreign homes under similar circumstances. The events of last night oblige me to speak plainly, even at the risk of losing your regard. I should be but a false friend were I to act otherwise!"

"Nay, Helen, dear," said the Contessa sadly; "my friends are not legion that I should be angry with the only sincere one I have because she speaks openly to me! But you cannot understand my position unless you could fancy yourself situated as I am. You, in your bright spring-life of love and hope, who have known the blessings of home, a mother's and father's tenderness, only exchanged for the devotion of a lover, you cannot realise what it is to be alone in the world ; what it is to be deceived by the only being one has ever trusted ; to be forced into a distasteful marriage because home is *no home* ; because one is regarded as an encumbrance, standing in the light of one's sisters, requiring too much food and clothing ! How can *you* understand or feel for me? *Your* life has been all love, and mine has never known any, not even that natural tenderness of a mother, which every dumb animal bestows upon its young ! *You* married for love, I — well, well!" seeing an imploring look in Helen's now streaming eyes. "Never mind what my honeymoon has been : you talk to me of *happiness* ! Is there any happiness

in being chained for life to a creature whose every habit is offensive to the delicacy of an Englishwoman; who has no idea of the decencies of life, no consideration for another's tastes or sentiments; whose very religion is made up of paganism and mummary? Oh, Helen, Helen! have I not sacrificed my hopes in the next world, as well as in this, by denying my faith on my marriage? and yet, you talk to me of *happiness*! God forgive me, for I am a miserable being!" And, sinking on her knees, and burying her face in the sofa-cushions, the unhappy young woman rocked herself to and fro in the extremity of her mental sufferings.

Hardly knowing how to act towards a person whose excitable feelings and ill-regulated mind were strange and new to her calmer nature, Helen hesitated for a moment to approach the Contessa, feeling how vain it was to offer mere condolence to such a heart-grief as hers; but the next, all the love and pity which overflowed her pure heart took the one right direction, and, kneeling beside her companion, and twining her arms around her, she poured forth trembling accents of prayer to the Almighty, that the sorrow now tearing that "broken and contrite heart" might be a "godly" one, working "repentance to salvation."

Louisa's sobbs grew calmer, and changed to quiet tears, which Helen allowed for a while to flow unchecked. Then she raised her from the ground, and a fervent, silent pressure from her companion's hand as she did so told how her tenderness was appreciated. She made her take some food, for it appeared that she had touched nothing since the preceding evening, after which, when she saw her able to listen, she spoke to her gentle words — words of pitying love — which were balm to that poor suffering heart. Helen's religion was not that of

the Pharisee, "God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are." She did not add one drop of bitterness to

"this cup of grief,
Where floats the fennel's bitter leaf!"

No reproof, no reproach, passed her lips, but, like a faithful disciple of her Saviour, she bade her suffering sister "Go, and sin no more;" pointed out to her how she might strive to win her husband's affection by *deserving* it; how she must first perform *her* vows and duty as a wife ere she might murmur at his neglect in the fulfilment of *his*; and as to her religion—ah! Helen felt she dared not touch there.

The Count allowed his wife to retain the exercise of her own faith in private, and Helen told her, diffidently, to "search the Scriptures" for light and guidance from on High; to "*agonise* to enter in at the strait gate!"

"Heaven bless and reward you, dearest Helen," said Louisa, with streaming eyes, as the latter rose to depart. "You can never know the comfort you have been to me this morning, for you will never need a friend in the same way!"

"Who can say that, Louisa? Sorrow visits each one of us in turn, therefore, we must all 'watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' And now lie down and try to get some sleep, for you are worn out, dear;" and, kissing her affectionately, Helen returned to her own home.

"Se a ciascuno l' interno affanno
Si leggesse in fronte scritto,
Quanti mai che invidia fanno
Ci farebbero pietà!"

So wrote the sweet Italian poet, and his words rose

forcibly to Helen's mind as she drove slowly to her residence. Louisa said that she had only exchanged "a mother's and father's tenderness for the devotion of a lover;" but Helen knew too well that Gaetano had long ceased to be or to act the part of one. She saw little of him now, for he passed the greater portion of his days and nights with his frivolous boon companions, who were little better than horse-jockeys in their tastes and sentiments. When she did see him he was often irritable and cross, a mood arising, she strongly suspected, from his losses at play; and at such times he would often complain of the scanty sum allowed them by Mr. Mowbray, and urge her to write for more money. But this she resisted. She well knew her father's open-handed generosity, but her heart revolted from begging large donations only to be squandered at cards or billiards. Gaetano could obtain little from his mother, who looked sharply after her own affairs; wherefore he vented his wrath and vexation on his delicate, helpless wife, at a time when she required all his tenderness and consideration.

Yes, Helen hoped soon to be a mother, and prayed hourly that her child might be a girl, that she might bring her up in her own religion. This point Gaetano had conceded when urged by Mr. Mowbray on the subject before his daughter's marriage. If the child proved a boy, he would be made over to the priests for his education, and Helen shivered at such a prospect! To have her own child taught to regard his mother as a *heretic*, and to owe her no respect—oh! it would be dreadful! And this idea made her first dimly see, as "through a glass, darkly," the consequences of marrying one of a religion differing from her own! English Roman Catholics were an enlightened and more liberal race; and knowing this, she had never conceived

the darkness and prejudice inseparable from those of Southern Italy, till sad experience and constant intercourse with them opened her eyes to the fact. Unlike Neapolitans in general, who are usually attentive to their wives when delicate, not from any particular attachment to them, but from selfish care of their offspring,—their *own flesh and blood*,—Gaetano still went his own way undisturbed by any anxiety for Helen, and she was left chiefly to be looked after by his mother, who, with her antiquated ideas, dating from at least two centuries before, almost made life a burden to the poor girl. She expressed a great desire to be attended in her confinement by an English practitioner and nurse, but her mother-in-law evinced such horror at the idea that Gaetano, influenced by her opinion, desired Helen to relinquish any such notions, as he would not have his child's life imperilled by the rashness of any English surgeon. How could a foreigner treat her as safely and skilfully as one who knew the climate?—a fallacy which finds advocates among wiser (?) heads than Neapolitans can boast of. Helen yielded with her usual gentleness, and tried as well as she was able to soften the matter to her mother, who had no faith in Neapolitan doctors, and suffered much anxiety about her child. The latter, on her side, had sounded her husband as to the possibility of inviting Mrs. Mowbray to join them at Naples, the poor girl longed so much to have her mother with her; but his distaste for the plan effectually stopped it.

“He have the Mowbrays prying into his affairs, as they would be sure to do, and finding fault with everything? No, no, the less Elena saw or heard of her relations, except in pecuniary matters, the better.”

And so he went on his way with a careless mind if his pockets happened to be filled, and a heavy one when the

reverse proved to be the case. Like the butterfly in the
old song, Castelbianco

“was a gentleman
Of no very good repute;
And he roved in the sunshine all day long
In his scarlet and purple suit.
And he left his lady wife at home
In her own secluded bower,
While he like a bachelor flirted about
With a kiss for every flower.”

CHAPTER IV.

HELEN reached home sufficiently worn out by the events of the morning. Her faithful Jones met her on entering her own rooms with the announcement that Castalbiano had been making repeated inquiries after her.

"What does he want? do you know, Jones?"

"No, my lady, I don't; but the Prince appeared in a great flurry. I told him your ladyship had gone to the Contessa di Malafede's."

"I will seek him immediately;" but as Helen moved towards the door, her maid stayed her a moment to draw her attention to the beautiful court dress which had just arrived from Paris.

Jones had been busily employed that morning unpacking the case, and arranging the exquisite production, so as to show off its several beauties to the best advantage, against her young mistress' return home; wherefore now she felt no little disappointment that Helen should think of leaving the room without even bestowing a glance on the result of her tasteful labours.

There was to be a *baciamano* the next day, and Helen was then to be presented for the first time as a *faithful subject* of his Sicilian Majesty. This morning, however, her thoughts were filled with other and more

serious matters than court robes, and her maid was greatly disgusted at the cursory look she gave to the delicate lace and moirée antique before her. Just then the door was opened noisily and her husband entered.

"Elena, where have you been?"

"To the Contessa di Malafede's, poor thing, she is——"

"What do I care about the Contessa? I have been asking for you repeatedly."

"I am very sorry, dear Gaetano, that I have kept you waiting. Jones, you may leave the room;" seeing that her maid, with whom Castalbiano was no favourite, lingered.

"Is that your court dress?" asked Gaetano, striding towards it.

"Yes, it has just been unpacked; do you like it? I ordered that it should be white, as you prefer that to colours."

"As it will not be required, you may send it back to Paris. Elena, you cannot go to the *baciamano* to-morrow."

"Well, that is no great disappointment to me! Is it postponed?" inquired Helen, not seeing her husband's countenance, as she was re-arranging some folds of the train which had got out of order.

"No, the *baciamano* will take place as usual."

"Then why are we not to attend it as you settled to do?"

"Because—because——"

Castalbiano grew confused, and Helen looked up from her employment somewhat surprised. He walked to the window, but, quickly returning, said hurriedly,

"You must know it sooner or later. Sua Maestà will not receive you as my wife!"

Helen started. "And why not?"

"Because a marriage between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant is not valid in my country."

"Gaetano! . . . But you know we were legally married in England?"

"Sì, *figlia mia*, but England and Naples are two different places. You remarked that we were invited to the Accademia as the Principe di Castelbianco and Miss Mowbray*; but still I hoped Sua Maestà would not have raised difficulties."

"Then you were aware of this before, and never told me?"

"And what good should I have done by telling you unnecessarily? Now the matter grows serious, and you must see yourself there is but one thing to be done."

"And that is ——?" Helen's voice faltered terribly.

"You must enter the bosom of the Church immediately; I have already spoken to Padre Calvi, and he has promised to expedite the affair."

Helen felt her limbs giving way beneath her, and sat down pale and breathless. Gaetano having taken the *premier pas*, — whereof the anticipation had made him rather nervous, as he had dreaded a scene, — and perceiving how quietly his wife bore the news, felt his courage return apace.

"*Via, figlia mia*, all will be right soon, and then you can wear this *abito di gala*!"

"When you married me in England at your own church, and promised that I should exercise my religion freely and unchecked here, did you know then you were deceiving me?"

"Orsù, Elena, I did not wish to deceive you! Our

* A fact.

marriage was legal there, and I was certain you would soon follow the example of others of your countrywomen by becoming a Christian on leaving the prejudices of your friends and country behind you. Mixed marriages require a dispensation to legalise them and ——”

“And why not procure one then — or even now?”

“Because Sua Santità gives very few annually, and those are only obtained at a vast expense of money, trouble, and interest!”

“My father will willingly give the money.”

“Ah bah! Elena, don’t be silly. Why waste money and time when the same result can be so much more easily attained by your becoming a Christian?”

“I am one already.”

“A *better one*, then,” and Castelbianco shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“Gaetano, I have already told you that on that point I am quite resolved. I can *never* be a Roman Catholic. The more intimately I become acquainted with your religion the more firmly persuaded am I of the truth of *mine*; and were I to change against my earnest convictions, I might as well turn infidel at once, for any hope I might retain of favour in the sight of God!”

Helen had risen as she spoke, and though her face continued colourless, her voice was low and firm.

“This is mere obstinacy; you heretic English are like so many *ciucci*!”

Helen uttered no comment on this coarse address, as her angry husband paced up and down the room, muttering to himself in a torrent of Neapolitan invective. Suddenly he paused.

“Have you reflected on the consequences to your child of such obstinacy? Is it to be illegitimate?”

Helen shivered visibly from head to foot; then for the first time her tears fell, as, remembering David's prayer, she cried with him, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done?"

She went up to her heartless husband, and, clinging to his arm to steady her trembling form, while the tears flowed unchecked down her pallid face:—

"Gaetano, it is cruel to tempt me! My poor father, for the sake of his darling, will give you any money necessary for the dispensation. Padre Calvi is kind, he will help us; speak to him, ask his advice, try every means, only do not require me to change my religion—anything but *that*! I cannot, I cannot!" And the poor child hid her face on his arm, sobbing convulsively, but her husband shook her off ruthlessly.

"And yet you are always boasting of your great love for me! Is this a specimen of it? Perhaps you prefer living with me as *Miss Mowbray*; it will be more independent, certainly, and we can part when tired of each other! It will be news to your father, I think."

"My poor, poor father!"

"Ay! it is easy enough to say '*poor, poor father!*' *Ma le parole non mi bastano, voglio fatti! Hai inteso?*"

Helen made no reply, but buried her face in her hands, while her husband continued in a suppressed voice,—

"*Senti, Elena.* It will take months, perhaps, to procure a dispensation. My interest may never even suffice for it; therefore you may as well do at first with a good grace what you will be driven into at last; and if you have any natural affection or care for your coming child, you will not subject it to the world's scorn!"

Helen uncovered her face and gazed steadily at her husband; who involuntarily averted his eyes from that pure, innocent countenance.

"Gaetano, in the sight of God and in that of my own countrymen, I am your wife, and thus my child will not be illegitimate. As you allow me no alternative but to renounce my religion — which I cannot, *dare* not perform, whatever the cost! — I must return to my parents: they will shelter both me and my poor innocent baby, if God give it me! I cannot live with you here to be regarded by your sovereign and friends as your mistress!"

Who shall describe what followed?

Her words had hardly been uttered when Helen staggered beneath a wicked blow, and then fell heavily to the earth, while her brutal husband, first calling Jones to look after her mistress, strode away from the room without a thought of pity for his poor young wife!

Jones was distracted with terror at the sight that met her eyes on rushing into the room. Like the generality of her class, her first impulse was to scream; but her cries were instantly hushed by a stern commanding voice at her elbow.

"Silence, woman! Is that the only assistance you can give your mistress — summoning all the household into her room as to a sight? Help me to lift her."

Padre Calvi — for it was he that had entered — assisted her to raise the poor senseless form: Jones, notwithstanding her awe of the priest, with difficulty restraining her sobs at the grievous spectacle.

They laid her on the couch.

"And now," said Padre Calvi, authoritatively, "open the window wide, get some strong salts, and bring some

water; the Principessina has only fainted; but, above all, tell no one what has happened."

Jones promptly obeyed; they bathed her bruised forehead, which had struck against a chair, with vinegar and water; and after a while their efforts were rewarded by seeing Helen recover. She gazed inquiringly at both, with a frightened look in those usually soft, violet eyes, which was sad to see.

"Do not speak yet, my daughter," said the priest, gently, "you are not strong enough: drink some of this wine," and he held the glass towards her.

She took it, mechanically, and obeyed him without a word.

Padre Calvi signed to Jones to leave them; and as she retired, he seated himself beside the sofa and waited. At length Helen, finding her forehead painful, raised her hand to it, and felt the wet linen laid on the injured part. She looked her inquiry, and the priest answered it.

"You hurt yourself in falling, and I have applied vinegar and water to the bruise."

"Ah! yes—I remember. But why did you care for me? Better have let me die!"

"Daughter, thy words are sinful! We may not wish for death unless the Lord send it."

"Oh! let me die—let me die! what have I to live for now?"

"Hush, my daughter! such words beseem thee not. Remember that another life is dependent on thine!"

"Oh, father! you do not know all."

"Yes, poor child, I do: it was a wrongful act; I saw it, for the door was open; but your husband is already penitent."

A feeble ray of relief crossed Helen's features, but

recollection checked it : though her husband might be sorry for the rashness of a moment, had he not deceived her purposely for long months ?

Alas ! too truly she saw that her idol lay shattered at her feet, and who could restore it as it existed before in her imagination ? Her faith in his truth and honour had departed, never to return.

“Trusting affection, confidence,
The holy and the deep ;
Feelings which rained sweet influence ;
It is for these we weep.

I pity thee, thy trust
Too short a life has known !
Too soon thy temple is in dust,
Thy first, fond faith o'erthrown.”

“Father, I readily forgive the ——” she could not utter the word *blow*, it seemed to choke her. “But he mentioned things—I cannot tell them clearly, I feel so weak,”—and she passed her hand piteously over her brow,—“Oh ! they were dreadful.”

“My daughter, think not of them now, you are too feeble and suffering ; but all will be well, trust me ! Will you see the Prince ? I would have all differences with your husband set at rest at once.”

“Padre Calvi”—and she started up—“he says *I am not his wife !*”

The priest tried to soothe her excitement, and succeeded in making her lie down again, but she went on talking.

“I must go away. Papa will take care of me and my baby. Gaetano said we were not married,—tell me, is it true ?”

“Daughter, according to the laws of this country, it is so ; but the remedy lies with yourself. Your com-

pliance with the just wishes of your husband — who, with all his faults, loves you truly, and cares much for your eternal welfare — will bring peace and harmony, not only to your own breast, but also to the entire household. You will regain that influence over him which has been waning of late; — (ah! how well he knew the secrets of her bosom!) — he will seek for sympathy at home, whereas he now unfortunately looks for it abroad; and you will have the joy of guiding him by the dictates of your own innocent heart!”

“How can I evince more love than I have done? What can I do more to win his sympathy?”

“True, daughter, you have loved much; but ask yourself if there is not an invisible barrier between you? Does it not sit at your board like the skeleton at the feasts of Egypt? do you not feel its presence in the darkness of the night, and its chilly influence in the glare of the sunshine?”

He paused, and fixed her with his cold, clear eye, even as the rattlesnake fascinates its victim. Helen trembled, but said not a word; and the priest continued:

“Did you not swear before your own altar, ‘to love, to cherish, and *to obey*?’ and, to begin, are you fulfilling this last clause of your vow by peremptorily declining to take his most earnest wishes into consideration?”

He caught an almost inaudible whisper.

“‘For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.’”

“Daughter, do you seek ‘the praise of God’ by neglecting the care of a soul which is committed to your trust? Do not the Scriptures say, ‘He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from

death, and shall hide a multitude of sins?’ Can you influence your husband’s mind for good when religion is a sealed subject between you? can yours be the privilege to instruct a son—if you be blessed with one—and hear his first prayer whispered at your knees? No, a stranger will rob you of this joy! And yet at the last Great Day *you* will be held accountable for the teaching your child will have received from others, because you refused to fit yourself for a mother’s duties! Husband and child may then rise up in judgment against you, not for what you have *done*, but for what you have left *undone*!”

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” and Helen ‘cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry!’

Oh! what a torrent of doubt, fear, despair, threatened now to overwhelm her mind. Had she in truth erred so greatly? By clinging so tenaciously to her own religion and refusing to hear any arguments on the other side, had she indeed lost her husband’s affection and the right to guide her children in the narrow ‘way, which leadeth unto life?’ Ought she not in so vital a matter to have forgotten self entirely, and sought rather by an outward profession of Romanism to gain the good will and confidence of her husband and his mother? As a Protestant she had now no power to turn his thoughts to sacred matters, and draw him from the constant society of his dissolute companions. Her mother-in-law hated her, she knew, every one regarded her as an intruder, a heretic, and by compliance with their wishes, if only outwardly, she would confer happiness on all,—and oh! she pined so much for sympathy and love!—Oh! that she could see her way clearly. Yet she was told that her change now would legalise her

marriage, and was not that in itself a proof that her duty lay in obedience to Gaetano's wishes? She had once read an allegory in which two children were sent forth to walk alone in a beautiful land, beset, however, with dangers and temptations on every side: they carried small crosses in their hands, and holding these aloft in the bright sunshine, they were told to follow the shadows they cast upon the earth—their safety depending on their obedience. She recollected this little story now—as one often does remember long-forgotten trifles in the midst of some mighty trouble—and she prayed fervently that it might be shown her where the shadow of *her* cross lay! She could not perceive one distinct image before her; but as it were the reflection of many crosses cast by different false lights, all pointing various ways and leading her astray.

"My daughter,"—the low musical tones of the priest made her start,—"*question not yourself on subjects that are too abstruse for you to understand unaided: as 'the servant of the Lord,' it is surely my place to instruct you and to solve your difficulties. We will converse and pray together for spiritual guidance, and I will lend you books written by holy men; these will set at rest any doubts which may linger in your mind!*"

Was *he* "the servant of the Lord" appointed to instruct her in the truth, or was Mr. Hill her proper teacher? Then, like a flash of lightning, she recollected the good pastor's warning letter—his advice to her never to be tempted into religious discussions with the priest, who would unsettle her belief and make her waver in her opinions,—a step that would entail the most disastrous consequences.

"Poor old man! but he could not foresee how I should be circumstanced."

She uttered the words "poor old man!" half audibly, and Padre Calvi deeming that her father occupied her thoughts, and that fear of grieving him influenced her, answered quickly:

"Think not of your parents; your present duty is to your husband, for it is written:

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house."

"And again:

"Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children."

Helen's thoughts flew suddenly to the Contessa, and she seemed to hear again distinctly the despairing words she had that very morning uttered to herself.

"Oh Helen, Helen! Have I not sacrificed my hopes in the next world as well as in this, by denying my faith on my marriage, and you talk to me of happiness?"

Helen had found the real shadow of her cross, and she prepared to follow its guidance along the stony tracks to which it pointed! Turning her gaze full on the now hopeful priest, she said slowly, emphatically:

"If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Padre Calvi, urge me no more, I must not do this thing! May God forgive me that love for my husband made me waver for an instant in the duty I owe to my Creator!"

He departed, and she was alone. She lay there in a kind of stupor,—it was sent in mercy to deaden the sense of grief and the bitterness of thought.

All that night confusion prevailed in the Palazzo

Castelbianco, and ere morning dawned a frail, tiny daughter,

"The child of misery, baptized in tears,"

was prematurely born into this world of care. The young mother lay delirious, her life almost despaired of.

"C'est un triste métier que celui de femme !"

CHAPTER V.

"HAVE you heard that La Principessina di Castelbianco is dying?" carelessly inquired Count Giulio as he leant in a graceful attitude against the Contessa di Malafede's carriage door. She was stopping before a shop in the Toledo, making some purchases, in which the "young Italy" men who lounged about, puffing cigars, and chatting with their acquaintances, evinced as much interest and knowledge as she could have done herself.

"Oh, impossible! she was with me only yesterday," cried the Contessa, dropping in her consternation the delicate lace she was examining.

"Ah! it was sudden, to be sure, but I saw Castelbianco a little while ago;—you know that Sua Maestà refused to receive her at the *baciamento* this morning?"

"I wondered at not seeing her there!" faintly ejaculated the lady, turning very pale.

"That was the reason; but now she intends to become a Christian, and it will be all right,—I mean the marriage,—that is, if she live, but she was confined in the night."

"Al Palazzo Castelbianco, prestissimo!" and leaving the dandy and the discomfited shopman standing in the street *a bocca aperta* at her sudden departure, the Contessa drove off as quickly as the crowded thoroughfare would allow.

On reaching the Strada Monte di Dio, Louisa's heart

sank on beholding a quantity of straw laid down before the Palazzo. She descended from her carriage at some little distance from the house, and without attending to the porter's "*non riceve*," ran up the gloomy staircase as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her.

She found the door of the Castalbancos' apartment open, while an air of desolation prevailed around, no sound breaking the stillness. She passed through the outer rooms without encountering a soul, but as she was hastening mechanically towards Helen's own boudoir, she felt her progress arrested, and turning, beheld the old housemaid, who with tearful eyes whispered:

"Oh, 'Celenza, non iate avanti; chell' angiola stà pe' morì'!" *

"Dov' è la cameriera?"

The poor woman signed to her to wait, and disappeared. Nearly ten minutes elapsed before Jones arrived. She then entered hurriedly, and saying, "This way, my Lady," led her into what was evidently her own room.

"Oh, my Lady, I beg your pardon for bringing you in here, but I must speak to you, if you please!" and then, overcome by her feelings, the faithful servant burst into a flood of tears, in which Louisa with difficulty refrained from joining.

"Jones, is she really so ill?"

"Yes, my Lady, I fear so, and she has only a Neapolitan doctor, though she always begged for an English one, and he has been bleeding the poor young thing for the fever, he says; between them all they are sure to kill her! I got in a rage at last, and told him he should not bleed her again, or I should write to my master,—

* "Oh, Excellency, don't go any further; that angel is dying!"

Mr. Mowbray I mean,—and tell him they killed her and I got the priest to interfere, for you see, my Lady, they attend to him. But the Prince is in a fuss because it's a daughter,—a poor little darling it is!—and the old lady—not much of a lady, anyhow,—calls my dear mistress an 'eretic, and won't go near her! And the priest has been and christened the pretty pet his fashion, and it will break my lady's heart if she live to know it, that it will!"

Here another violent burst of tears stopped all further utterance. Louisa quietly took off her bonnet and shawl, and then said calmly :

"I will stay here, Jones, and help you to nurse her; she shall not be left all alone, and I think she likes me."

"Heaven bless you, my Lady! I am sure she does, for though she never made any complaint, she liked her own people better than these foreigners, and no wonder to be sure! For I'll say it to my dying day, that the Prince killed her, that I will."

"Hush, Jones! you must not speak so unjustly of your master."

"Unjustly indeed! Didn't he strike her a blow yesterday, that she has the mark of now on her poor shoulder, and didn't she fall and knock her white forehead against a chair? And wasn't she quite stupid when she came round, till she was taken ill? Unjust, am I? I saw him do it, for I was in her bedroom, and the door was ajar, and then as I was entering in he bid me look after her, and went away quite unconcerned!"

"Is this true?" asked Louisa, hardly able to speak for horror.

"Yes, my Lady, it *is* true, and the priest knows it, for he came in with his velvet tread, as he always does,

creeping about the house like a cat, that no one hears till its claws make one screech out again with fright, and he bid me be silent about it; but, dear Lady, you are English, and my poor mistress liked you, and you were at the Park often, and I must tell you; besides, I want you to write word to Mr. Mowbray. I'd do it myself, but I take a long time to write a letter, and the poor darling wished so much to see her papa and mamma before her confinement, and now, may be, she'll die without seeing them at all." And the good creature's sobs broke out again.

Louisa stood pondering a moment. If the Prince ill-treated his gentle wife, he would not be very likely to summon her parents to Naples, where they might learn the fact; then the child had been baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, whereas Helen had always confidentially told her that the baby, if a girl, would be brought up a Protestant. And what did Count Giulio mean by saying that Helen was not received at Court — that she was about to turn Roman Catholic, and then the marriage would be all right? Yes, Mr. Mowbray ought to know what danger his child was in!

Louisa was a creature of impulse, and did not take long to come to a decision on any point. Jones remained silent, watching her changing countenance in great anxiety.

"You are right, Jones, but there is a quicker mode than writing. I will send off a telegram immediately, and will then return to share your watchings by your poor mistress' bedside."

Louisa was again shawled, bonneted, and in her carriage in less time than Jones took to recover the calmness necessary in a sick room. But the poor woman's

heart was lightened of a weary load, one which had gone on accumulating for many months. The affection she bore Helen made her quick to observe the latter's failing health and spirits, her solitary, cheerless existence — the neglect of her husband. A stray word, dropped now and then, proved how she clung to the memory of home, for though Helen was not one of those who make companions and confidants of their maids, still Jones was the only English being near her, and was likewise associated with the dear Priory and home. She could speak to her on both these loved subjects, sure to meet with ready sympathy. And so a bond of union and attachment, strong though unspoken, existed between these two — mistress and maid.

CHAPTER VI.

THE beautiful grounds belonging to the Priory and all the surrounding country were alike clad in a vesture of pure white, which, besides its wearisome sameness, offered a dazzling view that made the eye ache to rest on.

"The wrathful winter hast'ning on apace,
With blust'ring blasts had all ybar'd the trees,
And old Saturnus, with his frosty face,
With chilling cold had pierc'd the tender green;
The mantles rent wherein enwrapp'd been
The gladsome groves, that now lay overthrown,
The tapets torn, and ev'ry tree blown down." — *Sackville*.

It was a dreary scene truly, and few could resist its depressing influences, and the contrast it offered to the winter of the preceding year when our tale opened was sad to think upon.

This winter of 18— was remarkable in England for its extreme severity, and the consequent sufferings endured by the poor in all parts. Those whose lot was cast in the Western Counties were, however, better off than their neighbours, and the tenants on Mr. Mowbray's estate were looked after with most faithful care, as a trust of which an account must be rendered to a Higher Power.

Mrs. Mowbray's frail constitution prevented her from personally visiting her daughter's especial protégés; but

her husband when nominally out for a ride on his sure-footed old pony, might have been seen stopping at many a lowly cottage, leaving there some little luxury of tea or sugar with which the capacious pockets of his great-coat were ever filled. It was always:—"Before writing to Helen, I must go and see her old favourite, to be able to send her a full report;" or, "Nurse will want to hear the last account of her child."

Yes, Helen was not forgotten, and if its wintry garb made the country mournful and desolate out of doors, the old Priory was equally shorn of its light and brightness in the absence of its one pet lamb. The Christmas decorations of boughs and holly still adorned the walls, and were wreathed gracefully round the ample chimney in the great hall; but where was she who used to form the joy of the household at this glad season of mirth and festivity? It seemed but a mockery to dress the old house in holiday attire when the sole being that brought sunshine to its roof-tree was absent! The father talked cheerily about his darling, he was proud of her beauty, of her high position, of the notice and admiration she must excite everywhere; but he missed sadly the cosy fireside that once had been on winter nights. He listened in vain for the youthful voice and ringing laugh which used to gladden those ancient walls, and an opening door would often make him start round, as if the graceful figure he loved so well were entering. But the fond father "never told *his grief*" though it was a bitter one!

He had hoped to have his declining years cheered by his daughter's presence. An English husband would have proved to him the son which Providence had denied him, and during constant visits to the Priory, these two children might have learnt under the old

man's eye to care for the estate that one day would be theirs, and interest themselves in the tenants — "Helen's people" as her father always called them. Dreams! dreams!

The future was now a source of trouble to Mr. Mowbray, — love for his child, and a desire for her worldly prosperity, which the possession of so large an estate would secure, were opposed by his sense of the duty he owed his tenantry.

It was unlikely that Helen would ever be able to live on the property. Her foreign Roman Catholic husband, fettered by the prejudices of his class, and in bondage to his wretched government, would be little likely, if he had even the will, to understand the duties of an English landlord, so that a hired agent would be paid to perform what had hitherto been attended to rather by a *friend* than by a mere master.

Mr. Mowbray dwelt often and sadly on this prospect; the estate was his daughter's due, but what would be its ultimate fate? Were it not better, more just to all parties, to bequeath it to a distant cousin, of whose disposition and capabilities he heard but one universally good opinion — first making proper provision for his child — than to suffer the risk of its falling into the power of a Neapolitan?

Again: Helen was soon to become a mother. If she had a son, he would be trained in his father's steps, and would be no child of hers, but a Protestant daughter might be thoroughly Anglicised. He (Mr. Mowbray) might stipulate in his will that the girl, when grown up, should live principally in England and at the Priory, that she might know her people and be known of them.

And thus Mr. Mowbray pondered, and wavered, and debated within himself daily.

His wife's mind was otherwise occupied, and full of maternal anxiety at the present time on her darling's account. Mrs. Mowbray's health had become more delicate of late, and the severity of the season tried her much; she felt more deeply than she expressed the separation from Helen, the long distance that divided them, and the foreign life in which she could neither share nor sympathise. It almost seemed to her that the child would not have been more lost to her family and friends if she had doomed herself to the living death of a convent. She could not look on Gaetano as her son-in-law, she could not follow, mentally, Helen's foreign pleasures and occupations, nor picture her new home and relations.

Poor Mrs. Mowbray felt as other mothers have done before her—that only daughters should not be allowed to marry, totally forgetting, like other parents, that the girl had only imitated her own example.

One January morning, when the sun amazed all beholders by showing himself for a short space, Mr. Mowbray's white pony might have been seen going its rounds in the little village of Torton at its usual jog-trot pace. Its master, enveloped in plaids and comforters, also presented a sunnier countenance than usual from out his wraps, and it appeared to influence all those with whom he conversed, for smiles were to be seen on their blue pinched-up physiognomies.

"Well, nurse," he cried cheerily, stopping at length before the little cottage, whose garden was now bare of flowers and green, "we have had a letter from Naples this morning, and all's well there."

"Heaven be praised for that same, Sir; and is Miss Helen quite well, poor dear?"

It was quite beyond the good woman's powers to give her child her new dignities and honours!

"Yes, *Miss Helen* is doing very well, and is not screwed up with the cold as we are. And it is very well that she isn't, for she writes word that she has not a fire-place in the house, and is obliged to manage with a brass pan full of charcoal. That would not suit us quite, would it?"

"No, indeed, Sir, sure! Why she must be perished?"

"Well, I don't know about that; she was going out a good deal, as the gay season had begun, and she was to be presented in a day or two to the King of Naples; one page at least of her letter was filled with an account of the dress she was to wear, which she thought her mother would like to hear about, but it was all High Dutch to me!"

"Sure-ly! How beautiful she would look, the dear young lady, beside those foreigners! They are the dark people with curly hair, ain't they, Sir?"

"You are thinking of the negroes, nurse. The Italians are not quite so bad as that."

"Ah, Sir, I didn't think the young gentleman, when he was here keeping company with Miss Helen, looked as white as I could have wished my darling's husband to be."

Mr. Mowbray laughed aloud at the disconsolate tone in which this criticism was uttered.

"Glad to hear that cheery laugh, my friend," cried a familiar voice behind him.

"Ah! Rector, is that you? Here's Nurse Evans wanting to wash the blackamore white!"

"How so?" asked Mr. Hill with a smile, as the

woman dropped him a curtsey, looking rather dissatisfied at being the subject of so much merriment.

"She ranks my respected son-in-law amongst the sable crew, and thus explains the grudge she has always borne him for carrying off her child!"

The Rector joined heartily in the laugh, and when they had reassured good Nurse Evans that Helen was not living amongst the Hottentots, the two friends wended their way together through the little village, Mr. Hill keeping pace beside the fat pony.

"Have you heard lately from the Princess?"

"To-day. She wrote her mother a long letter which contained manifold messages to you. You must come up to the Priory and hear them."

"I shall be delighted," answered the Rector, his kind face showing evident pleasure at Helen's remembrance of her old friend. "And how was she?"

"Very well, and apparently going into a good deal of society; to please her husband," she said. "But her mother is fidgetty, and says she should take more care of herself just now."

"Ah! to be sure, Mrs. Mowbray feels anxious, I dare say."

"To tell you the truth, my friend, she is the least mite in the world disappointed that Helen has not begged her to go to Naples for this important event; but, say I, the child will do very well, never fear, and she can't always be tacked to her mother's apron-string! It never answers for a young married couple to be inseparable from their parents."

"True," said the Rector, "I agree with you that they should always be left to shift for themselves at first, but still, it would be natural for Helen to have her mother with her at a time when she will need a tender nurse;

however, we forget that she has her mother-in-law at hand."

"Yes, but I don't fancy mothers-in-law in general; they are usually of an *agro-dolce* nature, and though Helen is very circumspect in her letters, I doubt whether the old Princess is an exception to the general rule."

There was a short pause, during which Mr. Mowbray exchanged greetings with many of his farming neighbours, all, without exception, making anxious inquiries after Helen's welfare. This pleased him visibly, and his honest, open countenance beamed with health and cheerfulness as he answered their questions, and thanked them at the same time for the interest they took in him and his.

"Does your daughter ever allude to Padre Calvi?" asked the Rector at length.

"Not often, but she seems to think well of him, and always says something in his favour, when she does mention his name. He must be an agreeable companion, and a well-informed one."

"He is," said Mr. Hill rather sadly; "those ecclesiastics who favour the English with their presence and society, are commonly picked characters, well able to make the most of their talents and opportunities."

"Faith, then, 'tis a pity we don't take a leaf out of their book, for the individuals we send into the enemy's quarters on the Continent are none of the brightest specimens. A few chance men with their wits about them, and the gift of the gab, might do a world of good, and steady many a wavering mind. Whereas they generally preach wide of the mark, as if anything would do for a subject,—politics or what not."

"If you please, gen'lemen," said a horseman who

now overtook them, mounted on a smoking animal, interrupting Mr. Mowbray's dissertation, "is this the way to Squire Mowbray's?"

"All right, my man; I am the Squire, and you may as well tell me now what you want, as wait till I get home."

"Beg pardon, Sir, I am a stranger in these parts, and didn't know you, Sir," and the man took off his hat respectfully. "I have brought a telegram which reached E—— about two hours ago, so I came straight off without delay, Sir."

"Give it me, then. Do you know where it's from? I don't receive many of these sort of things."

"It's in French, Sir; but here it is," handing the paper to Mr. Mowbray, who now took it rather anxiously on hearing what language it was in.

"I must find my spectacles first, I am growing as blind as a beetle." The glasses were hastily put on, but in another instant the paper fell from his trembling hand, and the Squire grew ashy white. The stranger, a strong young man, instinctively moved to support him in the saddle, fearful of his falling; and the Rector, much alarmed, begged his old friend to alight. This was effected with the powerful assistance of the man, for Mr. Mowbray seemed to be suddenly prostrated in mind and body from some distressing news conveyed to him by the telegram.

They led him to a large stone by the roadside, where they seated and gave him a little brandy from a case bottle which Mr. Hill always carried when visiting the sick and poor in such inclement weather. At length Mr. Mowbray signed to the Rector to read the paper he had just received. The contents ran thus:—

“A Mons. Mowbray, Priory, près d'E——.

“La Principessina est accouchée d'une fille. Elle est entourée de dangers, et vous fait des instances de la joindre au plus tôt.

“Naples, janvier ——.”

Mr. Mowbray suddenly arose and attempted to take a few steps, but he tottered in his gait.

“Stay, dear friend,” said Mr. Hill in a choking voice, “you had better rest a few moments longer to recover yourself, for you are unfitted just now for riding.”

“I must go, I must go, directly,” and he passed his hand painfully across his forehead, as if to remove something that oppressed his mind.

The stranger, with true delicacy, had retreated a little way out of hearing, while Mr. Hill endeavoured to steady Mr. Mowbray's steps and induce him to sit down a while longer; for he had a bewildered air that was sad to witness, and which really alarmed the Rector. The latter said a few words of consolation, entreating him at the same time to rally his presence of mind and be calm at a season when both were so necessary, as well for Helen's sake as for her poor mother's.

But Mr. Hill was ill fitted to offer comfort, for grief weighed heavy at his own heart. Helen was to him as a dear child; he had known her from the time that she lay an infant in his arms, and when a little older, he had loved to see her toddling about the rectory and playing in his garden, whose flowers, with the contradiction of childhood, she always preferred to the wealth of blossoms she might have had at the Priory.

Now all the fears and doubts he had ever felt con-

cerning this ill-omened marriage rushed back to his mind with redoubled force, and bitterly he reproached himself for not having reasoned more earnestly and *courageously* with Mr. Mowbray against allowing it to take place. He felt almost guilty; and as if the sentence were recorded against him — her pastor, her instructor — “Thou art the man!” If her father had been unable to refuse his child’s wishes — too loving to carry disappointment and sorrow to her young heart — he, the Rector, had no such excuse to offer for his negligence. He was no parent; wherefore then did he indulge in the weakness of one? Helen was so young that her grief would have been soon forgotten, whereas now, who could tell what misery was awaiting her? For Mr. Hill saw clearly in the words of the telegram, brief as the message was, that other reasons besides sickness called for Mr. Mowbray’s presence at Naples.

The latter repeated constantly, wearily, “She is dead! She is dead! I know it, I am certain.”

“My dear Mowbray, that she is very ill is most probable, but I think if you were merely summoned to receive her parting embrace, this (pointing to the paper he held) would have been otherwise worded; be sure that other grave circumstances require your presence to support your child, surrounded as she is by persons foreign to her both in habits and religion. Rouse yourself to face this trouble, quit you like a man, be strong; remember how sorely your poor wife will need comfort and support, and if you be powerless to afford it, who then can suffice?”

“Oh! Helen, my child, my only one! Why did that villain rob me of my ‘one little ewe lamb?’ why had he no pity on my gray hairs, to leave me childless and desolate in my old age?”

And at last the old man covered his face and wept.

It is a heart-breaking spectacle to see tears forced from a strong man's eyes! How bitter must be the grief that wrung forth those scalding drops, how crushing the woe that even man with his strength of body and mind can in no wise resist! Then the consciousness comes home to him — forcibly, as he has failed to realise it in the days of his prosperity — that he is but as “a leaf driven to and fro” on the face of the earth by all the storms of Heaven; that he is powerless to combat evil, to stand alone and say, “I am strong!” And yet this very weakness, which some are ashamed to acknowledge, has been sanctified to man by the agony of the Holy One,

“Jesus wept.”

Throughout the Bible, there are words that strike home to every heart, as “a two-edged sword,” applicable to every sorrow, searching out the hidden secrets of the most jealous bosom, and baring them to the startled gaze, as if they were cried aloud at noon-day in the market-place. Yet we verily believe that none are more full of comfort to our miserable human nature, none preach patience, submission, and afford a greater sense of the heavenly compassion we may expect, than these two words — standing alone as they do, that nought may distract the eye —

“Jesus wept.”

In a short time Mr. Mowbray recovered his outward composure, and assisted by his old friend and by the messenger, he mounted the pony, which had been patiently waiting by its master's side. They went to the childless home, which now, to the poor father, looked

desolate in the extreme. The servants, shocked at the change in their master's countenance, crowded round to offer their services, while he leant heavily on the Rector's arm, looking bent and worn, as though ten years had been added to his age. He turned to the old butler who stood by silent and distressed,—

“Saunders, I must start for London immediately; let all be prepared for me to save the express.”

The faithful servant cast an anxious, enquiring glance at Mr. Hill, but saw little comfort there.

“Will *you* break it to poor Charlotte?” asked Mr. Mowbray of the latter as he entered his study.

“If you wish it.”

Sad lot of the priest to be so often the one selected to convey sorrow to hearts at ease! But Mrs. Mowbray bore the tidings better than her husband; kind words, friendly accents, and blessed messages of hope and faith, softened the shock to her, whereas *he* had been stricken suddenly, without pause or preparation! And she, though a weak invalid and a woman, had been early taught the lesson of submission — had early learnt through sickness, and suffering, and bodily pain, meekly to cross her arms on her aching bosom, and bowing the head, to exclaim,

“‘It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.’”

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Helen first opened her eyes with awaking consciousness, they rested on the dear familiar face of her father. Seated ever by her side, he watched prayerfully, eagerly, for a ray of intelligence to illumine those large wild eyes, and smile back upon him as they did of old. Alas ! for long nights and days he had listened only to frightened cries, and delirious appeals to father and mother for help, and love, and sympathy ! The new life seemed obliterated utterly from her mind : it was the old home with its dear ones for which she wept and longed, with all the love of a true young heart. But a dread and nameless terror mingled ever with the wish, and pervaded all her dreams, and the poor father's heart ached that he could give no peace, no comfort to the troubled spirit that appealed to him unceasingly for both.

And thus he remained watching and praying much, gazing pitifully at the pretty head which, shorn of its thick tresses, moved restlessly on the fevered pillow, or else holding the wasted, transparent hand that strove to beat itself ruthlessly without the clothes. He would often kiss it in its burning heat, his own hot tears falling upon it, and it was once when the old man had thus stooped low over it with a groan of agony, that looking up again he met her gaze — no longer terrified, unknowing, but calm, and full of love ! With a cry of

joy he rose from his knees, and bent over her eagerly ;— yes, she knew him, and a flickering smile played around the pale lips as he kissed them silently.

Poor father ! he dared not speak, he had been cautioned against exciting his darling — he could only kiss her gently, and throw all the tenderness that overcharged his heart into his eyes, now dimmed with tears.

And Helen showed no surprise at seeing him — it seemed natural to her to wake and find her father by her bedside, to feel his hand clasping hers ; was she not at home in her own little chamber, at the dear Priory ? But she felt very tired, very languid, and the eyelids drooped, and soon she fell asleep — peacefully as a little child, holding the old man's hand, while he, sinking again on his knees, poured out his heart in praise and thankfulness to the Great Giver of all good.

“ Great Providence ! How just are all Thy ways !
Never let man, howe'er he be distressed, abandon hope,
For in the moment when the cloud is blackest,
When the big storm rolls loudest o'er his head,
The hand of Heav'n, perhaps, may guide his steps,
And lead him back to peace.”

When Mr. Mowbray, travelling night and day, reached Naples, he was received by Castelbianco with unbounded surprise : — how, why had he come ? Who had called him ?

“ How is she ? — Is she alive ? ” were the father's first words, scarcely distinguishable for the fear that choked them.

“ Elena ? — she is very ill — but still lives.”

“ Thank God for that ! ” said Mr. Mowbray reverently. “ I started the instant I received your telegram. It was very kind of you to send it ! ”

“ *My telegram* ? — what do you mean ? I sent none.”

Mr. Mowbray looked surprised. "You did not send for me?"

"*Ma foi, non*; but you are very welcome, I am rejoiced to see you, and your presence will be a blessing to your daughter — my precious Elena!" and the man of the world's eyes were wet with tears as he grasped the hand his father-in-law held out to him from sympathy.

But who could have done this thing? he marvelled. Jones? She would not have dared! The Contessa di Malafede? More likely,— but why not mention it to him? And his conscience pricked him uneasily, though he was well accustomed to stifle its warnings. He asked her—guardedly—if she had summoned Mr. Mowbray? The answer was in the affirmative. Helen called so constantly for her parents, and the doctor thinking her in danger, she (the Contessa) would not delay.

"But why not tell me?" asked the Prince, *tant soit peu* sharply. "Though you certainly did well," he added more softly, "the responsibility will be greatly lessened."

"I feared he might not be able to come, and then there would have been disappointment; besides, I was so occupied with dear Helen, that I forgot everything but her." And the Contessa turned away, though not before she had marked the disappointed baffled look that overspread the Neapolitan's face.

The old Principessa was furious. Why had this stranger come to pry into their household affairs?— did he think her Gaetano was murdering his child? Had they not more nurses and doctors—all owing to that busybody, the Contessa di Malafede— than the heretic girl was worth? Heretic? Ah! yes, a pretty thing to be said of her orthodox family, that her daughter-in-law

lived and died an outcast from the true Church! Why had her only son heaped such disgrace upon his house and name? If he had done his duty, and followed the directions of D. Dominico, his wife might have been received into the faith even now at the eleventh hour! The Archbishop was ready to come to her and administer the Holy Sacraments, after hearing her recantation, and even Padre Calvi had hinted as much."

"Statevi zitto, Mammà.* How can Elena do any such thing when her mind is quite gone? And what would be said of me for allowing it?"

"*Piuttosto*, what will be said of you for *not* having done it long ago before her father came to put a stop to all our plans? *You* could have interpreted her wishes and answered for her, and saved her perishing soul! I questioned D. Dominico, and he told me I was right, and he appealed to the Archbishop, who agreed with him, and was to have come this very day. The child might as well die a member of our Holy Church and save our credit; as she could offer no opposition in her present state, the thing would have been *bell' e fatto, acconcio, acconcio!* And now what is to be done?"

"Quello che volete voi; only remember that I won't have *le belle pezze* † *del suocero* risked, not even to please D. Dominico. Avete inteso?" And not heeding the storm of words that poured from the virago's lips, her son quitted the room, slamming the door after him regardless of the vicinity of the sick chamber.

But who shall describe the mental relief experienced by the faithful Jones at sight of her beloved master!

* Neapolitan men, whatever their age, always speak to and of their parents as *papà* and *mammà*.

† Dollars.

"Ah! dear Sir, if you had been here before, she wouldn't have broken her heart, poor darling!" And the poor woman sobbed out her grief.

Inexpressibly shocked by such words, Mr. Mowbray sought an explanation, but in vain, Jones's sobs, scattered sentences, and hints quite mystified him; for now that she found all her wishes carried out, and her master actually present, the poor Abigail knew not how to tell her sad story for the best. She dreaded the consequences of his wrath in the household; she feared how he himself might bear the intelligence that any being with a "heart of flesh" could be cruel and unkind to so gentle and loveable a creature as Helen!

But at length he grew impatient. "What do you mean, woman? Speak out if you have anything to say!"

And Jones was beginning to collect her scattered brains, when Louisa entered the room.

"I can answer any of your questions, I think, Mr. Mowbray. Poor Jones is too excited and pleased at your coming, to be calm just now;" and so saying, she conducted him to a more private chamber.

"What does she mean? Helen's heart *broken*!" he enquired in consternation, as he stood staring at the Contessa with frightened gaze.

"Indeed, Mr. Mowbray, you must not take her words literally, — poor Jones, in her affection for her dear mistress, is apt to magnify anything that troubled her."

"Then she *had* troubles?" he persisted. "Poor darling, but they will soon be over!" and covering his face with his hands, the hot burning drops fell fast.

Louisa approached and laid her hand on his arm, her own tears flowing unchecked.

"Do not sorrow as those without hope; she may yet be spared to us all. God knows how ardently I pray for this blessing."

"Ah! you do not know what she is to me, how I have loved my child!"

"She is worthy of your love, Mr. Mowbray; but though I have so long known her, it was only lately that my eyes were really opened to her merits, for she has been a true friend to me!"

"Nay, you have been very kind to my poor darling. Heaven bless you for it!"

There was a silence of some minutes, after which, Mr. Mowbray, striving hard for composure, spoke, but in weakened accents.

"The Prince denies having summoned me by telegram; do you know who did?"

"It was I. I thought that parent and child should not be separated at such a time. Helen in her delirium always calls upon you and her mother. Jones also wished it much, and was the first to propose my writing, but I chose a quicker mode."

"Right, quite right, but the Prince might have thought of this."

"He has had much anxiety and trouble lately, and this may have made him appear negligent."

Louisa knew not how to proceed, for she felt all the delicacy of her position in the household.

The warm affection and gratitude she now bore Helen for her sympathy and friendship when she needed both, prompted her to inform Mr. Mowbray of all that had occurred to his daughter latterly,—her husband's ill-treatment and neglect, and the persecutions she suffered on account of her religion.

Since she had installed herself an inmate of the

house, Louisa's eyes had been quite opened to the discordant state of the family, and the ill-will borne to the *heretic* English intruder. D. Dominico, relying on the Contessa's change of religion, made no mystery to her of their united wishes to compel Helen to follow her example, and the present hitch concerning the marriage, now no secret in the town, was regarded by the confessor as a most favourable circumstance to further their views.

Padre Calvi alone kept silence, and from him she could gain no information, as he evaded all her questionings; but not for that did she cease to mistrust him, Jones having informed her that Helen had had a lengthened private conversation with the priest immediately after her recovery from her fainting fit. That when she (Jones) went to the Principessina on the Jesuit's departure, she found her mistress in a state of stupor from which she could not be roused, and this was followed rapidly by her illness. Louisa felt that Mr. Mowbray should know all this in order to act promptly for his child, yet if she interfered between man and wife who would thank her for her officiousness? Not Helen, if she sowed dissension and openly published the dread secret that her husband had struck her in a fit of passion. Not Mr. Mowbray, if she prejudiced him irremediably against his son-in-law, and made his life one long anxiety on his child's account. Besides, Padre Calvi must not know that she, a supposed faithful disciple, had counteracted his plans for the glory of the Church. How should she word her tale in order to avoid all these rocks and quicksands? Louisa's impulsive nature and her dread—aye, *dread*, Romanist though she was nominally—lest Helen, for the sake of her husband and child, and to obtain questionable peace,

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should be persuaded to change her religion, had made her summon Mr. Mowbray to his daughter's help; and now he was come, and how and what was he to be told?

She started as he addressed her.

"You said in the message, that dangers surrounded Helen; did you allude merely to her illness?"

"That was one reason for calling you, but — but, there was yet another."

He looked anxiously at the Contessa.

"Helen's illness was brought on by a mental shock, on hearing that she could not be presented at court, owing to — to her religion."

"Owing to her religion! — what can you mean? Does His Majesty require a confession of faith from all who approach his sacred presence?"

"Not exactly, but it appears that there has been some informality attending the marriage ceremony in England, which must first be rectified, for here the laws are most strict."

"She was legally married according to the rites of both Churches!" burst impetuously from her listener's lips.

"Yes, but without a dispensation from the Pope."

"It was unnecessary in England; the Prince knows it."

"True, but *here* it is indispensable to legalise the marriage of a Protestant and Roman Catholic when there is any property to inherit."

"Then it must be got immediately;" and he rose to seek the Prince.

"Stay one moment, I beseech you, Mr. Mowbray! My great love for dear Helen, my gratitude for her affection towards a desolate being, who but for her would be utterly friendless, have impelled me to take the active part in this affair that I have done. But in

the eyes of the world I am a Roman Catholic, the priests wish her to become one also; and if my interference with their views were known, the consequences to my husband would be severe. For myself I care not, I deserve no mercy; all I wish is to save Helen from becoming the miserable creature I am myself!"

"Forgive me, my dear Contessa; grief and anxiety have made me selfish. Your devotion to my poor child deserve a better reward than that I should place you in any difficulty. Tell me what you wish." And laying aside his own cares for the time, Mr. Mowbray led Louisa to a sofa, and seating himself beside her endeavoured to soothe her violent agitation with kind words.

When the Contessa grew calmer they talked the matter over, and she begged Mr. Mowbray to wait a day or two before entering into any discussion with the Prince, who perhaps might lead to the subject himself; but as it was openly talked of in the town, Mr. Mowbray might well be supposed to learn it also from public hearsay. Were he to mention it so soon, *she* would be marked out as his informant, whereas her object in sending him a telegraphic message was now merely attributed to a wish that he should see his daughter in case her illness should end fatally.

Wearied in body and mind, Mr. Mowbray agreed willingly to indulge in a short respite from business; grief and anxiety about Helen's ultimate fate so filled his thoughts, that all other cares were insignificant in comparison with this. He therefore crept back to his post by her bed-side, to fix his agonised gaze on that young delirious form, and pray that Heaven would spare her to him in his old age.

" . . . Pregar, pregar, pregar,
Ch' altro ponno i mortali al pianger nati?"

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. MOWBRAY'S delicate health had precluded the possibility of her joining in her husband's hurried journey, he having travelled night and day without stopping. But she followed as quickly as her strength would permit, and thus reached Naples shortly after Helen's return to consciousness, to be welcomed by her agitated husband with the glad tidings of her child's comparative safety.

Poor mother! The revulsion of feeling from blank despair to the light of hope, was at first almost as painful and overwhelming to her overwrought mind, as if the worst intelligence had awaited her. We will not, nay, we cannot, describe the gratitude and emotion, with which together, in the solitude of their chamber, the fond parents poured forth all their hearts in praise and thankfulness to heaven, for the mercy granted to them in their old age; for the restoration of their treasure, their dear and only child.

With much caution Helen was prepared to see her mother, that darling mother in whom her thoughts had so often centred during the dreary days she had latterly spent. Ah! how she used then to dwell on her tender love, and long to lay her aching head against that faithful bosom, and pour out all the pent-up grief of her lonely life! How she had yearned for her sympathy and support, for her advice and

guidance, amid the quicksands that beset her on every side. And now that mother was indeed at hand, ready to clasp her in her loving arms. The thought was almost too much for the poor girl, in her state of most lamentable weakness, and produced a violent fit of convulsive weeping, while the agitated parent stood apart, out of sight, listening, praying, mingling her own salt drops with those of her darling; yet she was forbidden to run and fold her in a warm embrace, and hush her sobs with low whispered words and gentle caresses.

When they succeeded in calming Helen, she lay motionless, and quite worn out: like a tired child she sobbed herself to rest, and a smile gradually played about her parted lips, as she slept and dreamed of home and heart-peace, such as had not visited her of late.

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow, remembering happier things."

At length, after patient watching, Helen opened her eyes.

"I have been dreaming," she whispered, with a faint smile.

"What of, dearest?" asked her father bending over her.

"I thought mamma was near, and speaking to me!"

"She *is* here, darling!" and with a sign, he motioned to Mrs. Mowbray to take his place.

"Oh, mother! mother!"

"My child! my own love!"

And the two clung to each other, in a long, silent embrace, their hearts too full for words!

Louisa now resigned her charge into Mrs. Mowbray's care with a lightened spirit, at seeing the former, through her own instrumentality, surrounded by such guardian friends.

Helen's affection and gratitude for her faithful watching were an exquisite balm to her restless, desolate spirit; and she grew to love that gentle being with all the intensity of her impassioned nature. Gladly would she still have remained to watch and nurse her, but she felt that her place was now the mother's due, and she retired, carrying with her the fervent blessings of the Mowbrays, and a sisterly attachment on Helen's part. When she took leave of the latter, she succeeded with difficulty in restraining her own emotion, but she loved her friend too truly to risk her safety by any excitement.

"Helen, I shall come to see you every day, and stay as long, or as short a time as you like."

"You know how welcome you will be, Louisa; you know also, how much I should like to thank you, for, under Heaven, I feel that I owe my life to your care!" and her lips quivered.

Louisa bent down to kiss them, and hide her own tears at the same time.

"You owe me nothing, Helen; in giving me your love, you have bestowed a treasure for which I cannot thank you in words, darling!"

She moved to depart, fearing to agitate Helen too much, but the latter's thin pallid hand stayed her yet a moment.

"Do you remember, dear Louisa, that morning before my illness?—our conversation?" And Helen's large eyes now painfully prominent, set in the wasted colourless face, looked imploringly at her friend, who struggled vainly to be calm.

"I do, Helen! I do!"

"Will you try, for my sake, not to despair, but to seek a remedy? I think you may brighten your home if you like!"

"Helen, you have taught me a lesson I shall not forget: Heaven bless you and your teaching! With God's help, I will do my best!"

They kissed each other affectionately, and parted; Louisa, with a more womanly heart than had been hers before the long night vigils by Helen's bedside had given her time and food for thought, and self-examination,—ay, we repeat it, *self-examination*; for she saw in her friend's patient, meek submission to the hardness of her lot, bearing it ever without a look, or word, that could lead others to imagine her unhappy or neglected, a lesson which she would do well to follow! Each had chosen her portion, but while one beat herself cruelly, hopelessly, against her prison bars, the other, with a spirit of martyr-like endurance, endeavoured by the light of faith "to do her duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call her."

Little the selfish, careless world wots of how many real martyrs are numbered amongst the frail, delicate women who walk meekly along their allotted course with a gentle smile for all. They scarce whisper a complaint to their own fond hearts, but hug their cross tightly to their torn, bleeding bosoms, and go forth calm and unmoved to greet the world; whereas others, who lift up their voices to weep and wail, perchance for nought, are pitied much.

"O what makes woman lovely? Virtue, faith,
And gentleness in suffering — an endurance
Through scorn or trial — these call beauty forth,
Give it the stamp celestial, and admit it
To sisterhood with angels!" *

When Helen could take notice of her baby, great was

* John Brent.

her thankfulness for this treasure granted to her! She would lie for hours, silently watching the tiny being beside her, and letting it clasp its wee fist around one of her own wasted fingers, while she wove dreams and fancies about its future. It was God's gift, sent to brighten her lonely existence; and surely it would learn to love her, and fill up the void in her heart, and satisfy her craving after affection? It was all her own; none could ever come between her and her child,—one in faith and blood and nationality. She felt almost angry with the smartly-dressed wet-nurse, who, for a time, partly robbed her of her treasure. She followed her with envious eyes, as she soothed it in her arms, and hushed its cries, or sang it gently to sleep. The mother could not bear to have it out of her sight, for was it not her own darling?

Gaetano did not share in all this sentiment: he was visibly disappointed at not having had a son; and, except when in duty bound in the presence of his wife and her parents, he paid but scant attention to his first-born child. Towards Helen he was all love and affection *apparently*:—though when he first approached her after her return to consciousness, and consequently *remembrance*—he was awkward, embarrassed, doubting what she might have told her friends. Poor wretch! he knew but little of a true woman's heart, how readily it forgives, how jealously it guards a secret sore! Helen imagined that only Padre Calvi knew of the cruel blow, which had left its signet in a black and yellow patch: but she felt confident that he—a priest—would tell nothing. And when her worthless husband bent over her with love speaking in those murderous eyes, hers were filled with tears and gratitude, and looked tenderly, pleadingly at him in return! A mutual kiss—in her

gentle forgiving breast—washed out all the past as if it had never been!

Mr. Mowbray early sought a conference with his son-in-law, a meeting which the Principe dreaded extremely, and did his best most carefully to avoid. But when the first grief and terror on Helen's account were allayed, the father was prompt to ask an explanation of all the stories he had heard relating to his daughter's illness. What had been this mental shock which had so prostrated her—what the obstacles to the validity of her marriage?

Castelbianco heartily cursed his father-in-law's inquisitiveness, and marvelled who had acted as tell-tale. But there he stood before him waiting for an answer to his question, and what could he say?

With many interruptions and much circumlocution—with well acted concern and indignation against the iron rule of his country—he mentioned the difficulty which had unexpectedly arisen; namely, His Majesty's unwillingness to acknowledge a marriage between a Protestant and a Roman Catholic.

"And knowing this peculiarity in His Majesty's opinions, may I ask why it was not guarded against at first by means of a dispensation?"

"Because, Monsieur Mowbray, I did *not* know that a marriage legally performed, as ours was, in your country would be pronounced invalid in *this*! I could not have married Elena *here*, but once united to her elsewhere, who would have expected such an obstacle to arise? Not I!"

Mr. Mowbray looked at him for a moment silently, as if he would have read the thoughts which filled that fallow brow. He had never regarded him with the blind confidence his daughter reposed in her lover, and

now his doubts knocked loudly for entrance and a hearing.

"Well, Monsieur le Prince," he said, after a pause, "have you taken the necessary steps to procure this dispensation?"

"My mind has been too much occupied with the state of my precious Elena to think clearly about the matter: moreover, I have waited for the return of my spiritual adviser Padre Calvi, who has been absent temporarily from the capital."

"There must be no delay in this business," said Mr. Mowbray, decisively; "your uncle the Cardinal is surely sufficiently powerful to take the initiative, and so obviate all necessity for consulting Padre Calvi. If money be needed it shall not be wanting."

Now all this was extremely distasteful to the Neapolitan, who had surely reckoned by this "*coup d'état*" to drive his wife into a change of religion. This hope had been growing "beautifully less," dating from the hour of her father's arrival, he being a stumbling-block which there would be small chance of removing!

"But, Mr. Mowbray, might there not be another and a quicker mode of removing this difficulty?" he began at length hesitatingly.

Mr. Mowbray fixed a stern gaze on the Neapolitan, which disconcerted him considerably.

"I have thought latterly that—that Elena has evinced a less decided objection to my Church, and,—and ——"

"And what?"

"And Padre Calvi has likewise hopes that her mind may be enlightened ——" he stopped with a changing colour.

"Go on, Monsieur le Prince," were the cold, calm

words which made it more than ever difficult for him to extricate himself from his labyrinth.

"Surely, Monsieur Mowbray, you must perceive that such a step on Elena's part would set all this trouble at rest instantly; to say nothing of the joy it would be to me."

Mr. Mowbray stared at the speaker silently with—for a moment—the sickness of fear at his heart! Could he name such a possibility without a shadow of foundation on which to raise the scheme? But no! the next instant he reproached himself for harbouring an unworthy doubt of his child, and recollecting Louisa's hints as to the priest's wishes and plans gave him full credit for the tale. Castelfranco he believed to be the Church's tool, though doubtless he spoke as he wished, and knowing how much the good things of this world enter into all the schemes of the priesthood, he wisely resolved instantly to crush all their expectations in that quarter!

"Monsieur le Prince," he said coldly, "could I believe my daughter capable of changing her creed, your words would disturb me much! As it is, I have full confidence in her principles, and in her love for our own Church, her good friend and pastor, Mr. Hill, having carefully grounded her in a knowledge of its truths. Were such a calamity—for I should regard it as such—*possible*, she need expect no further intercourse with her family. I should regard her no longer as a child of mine, nor would she have a claim at my death on any of my property. It is mine, freely to dispose of as I like, and I should certainly feel it a sacred duty not to suffer my tenants and estate to pass into Roman Catholic hands."

This was sufficiently startling!

"*Mon cher ami!* — *mon respectable beau-père*, do not, I entreat, contemplate any family division; such a thought alone would break our dear Elena's heart! I spoke at random — on no grounded conviction, I do assure you; I —"

"I am glad to hear it, Monsieur le Prince; but now that we have entered on money matters, let us understand each other clearly. On Helen's marriage I immediately made my will, in which, with the exception of some small legacies, I settled the estate and bulk of my property on my dear child —"

The Neapolitan seized Mr. Mowbray's hand in both his, and with tearful eyes besought him not even to allude to so distressing a subject as his demise; but his father-in-law, thanking him rather stiffly for his warm expressions of friendship, went on:—

"Her mother's jointure will be chargeable on the estate, which I do not think Helen will feel a burthen. The inheritance will descend from her to *her eldest daughter*, the little mite of a creature we have just welcomed. You look surprised? But I have said it is with me a case of conscience not to let the estate go out of Protestant hands; I owe it to my tenants, who are all in one sense my children. Helen's daughters will follow their mother's persuasion, and I hope—forgive the wish!—will be more English than Neapolitan!"

"*C'est naturel!*" but the words were spoken in a tone of blank disappointment which could not fail to be noticed by Mr. Mowbray, who, however, continued:—

"I do not wish to insist on it, but if neither of you have fixed on other names, I should like this dear baby to receive its mother's, *Helen Mowbray*? And when she in her turn picks up a husband, I have left directions that he shall take the surname of Mowbray in

addition to his own, *provided he be an Englishman and a Protestant*; otherwise the estate will go at Helen's death to the next heir-at-law, a distant branch of our family; for unfortunately my only sister and near relation, Lady Selwood, has no children. Have you misunderstood me, or shall I explain further?" for Mr. Mowbray remarked the abstracted air and pallor of the Neapolitan.

"No, no,—*comprendo*—(*pur troppo diamine*). Excuse my speaking Italian! It is clear, I understand: you are too kind—too liberal." He hardly knew what he was saying, poor wretch.

"Very well; then *that* matter is settled! As to the dispensation, it must be had as soon as possible; though, I believe, according to the laws of your country, little Helen II. will not suffer from this delay?"

"Oh, no! Carina, it will legitimise her directly! (*Cui bono?*)" he muttered savagely to himself.

Mr. Mowbray quitted the room, glad to have got through this piece of business; but had chance recalled him he would surely have thought his son-in-law had gone suddenly mad, could he have seen his gesticulations, and the way in which he stamped about the chamber, how he cursed and raved, how he clasped his hands and tossed his arms aloft!

"What had he done to be born under such an unlucky star? What evil spirit had placed him and his affairs in the power of these cursed heretics? What could it signify to the old man when quietly dead and buried whether his money profited a vile Protestant unbeliever or a faithful Catholic? What would become of him? He was ruined, undone! It was all Helen's doings,—she had put her father up to this!" and he vented his anathemas loudly on the gentle

being whose adverse fate had united her to such a miscreant.

He sat down at length resting his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands; a scowl settled on his black brows, his dark eyes glared at vacancy, and so he turned and twisted this complicated affair.

"The baby was already a Christian, thanks to Padre Calvi; all the household knew it, his mother, Don Dominico—Jones likewise. There would be no going through a second Protestant ceremony; the priests would not suffer it. Yet *chi sa* for a handsome consideration, a diamond necklace to the image at the Spirito Santo, or a golden crown to the Madonna del Carmine? *Che maladetta sorte* that Padre Calvi had been ordered to the provinces by his superiors! The evil could not be remedied without his co-operation and assistance, for the confessor had neither wit nor understanding; but before the priest's return the whole truth might come out, and then what was to be done? He might silence his mother, Don Dominico, and the Contessa—but Jones?"

Another curse,

"Not loud, but deep."

"If he only knew where to address a letter to Padre Calvi to ask his advice! Why had the priest been in such a hurry to baptize the child?"

Castelbianco had not been present at the christening, and in reality was not aware that it had taken place till afterwards; so that, when the fact should become known to Helen, he might truly tell her that he had not witnessed it, that Padre Calvi had himself performed the ceremony lest the child should die, as it was momentarily expected to do, unbaptized. But he had greatly

rejoiced at being able thus, with such apparent innocence, to outwit her and gain his ends without a flagrant breach of faith.

After long racking thought, he determined to enjoin silence to the household, on the plea of a desire that his child should be baptized with all the pomp due to his rank and family, the private nature of the first ceremony being rather humiliating to his vanity. He would also put off, on different pleas, any propositions on Helen's part, or that of her parents, to have the Protestant christening celebrated at present, in order that he might have a chance of seeking Padre Calvi's advice *a viva voce*.

CHAPTER IX.

A MONTH glided by peacefully and Helen slowly regained a portion of her strength, but she was still only able to move from her bed to a sofa. She was sadly changed in appearance, though tranquillity of mind was doing wonders for her, and the presence of her beloved mother was a boon for which she offered daily thanks to Heaven. Very much had these two fond women to talk over, past happy scenes, old friends, and new hopes and prospects all centring in that precious baby.

"A child is always a charming novelty, although Cain was the only really venerable and truly original baby;" but as no one realises the fact of *Cain* having worn long frocks and been rocked in a cradle—this reflection does not trouble the many admiring mothers, each of whom defies the world in general to produce an equivalent to her particular treasure! So Helen decided that *her* baby was the most perfect specimen of the genus, and her mother, who had once upon a time idolised her in a similar manner, now echoed the sentiment, as she was expected to do, with all due gravity.

Mr. Mowbray was also marvellously fond of the future representative of his name, and often took it in his arms, when, embarrassed by the long clothes and not knowing how to handle the atom, he would look so awkward and nervous, that even Helen, who watched his every movement, could not help laughing at his per-

plexity, though she did not feel quite easy until the baby was again in safer hands.

We once had a dog and cat that were fast friends and intimates, and if the latter had a family, Pincher always acted head nurse and looked after the babies when their mamma was absent. Very jealous and anxious he was to fulfil his self-imposed and arduous duties, but often he used almost to crush the unlucky kittens by the weight of his foot, or by sprawling over them to keep them warm. In his mode of carrying them about, wishing to imitate feline habits, his awkwardness greatly resembled that of poor Mr. Mowbray; for, instead of taking hold by the back of their necks, this tender nurse would open his slobbery jaws, seize a *mouthful of kittens*, and thus convey them gently and clumsily from place to place.

Certainly nursing is an art in which *he* creatures do not excel.

The Contessa di Malafedi constantly made an admiring fourth in these family parties, and very welcome was she to all; but soon she became a mother herself, and Helen's baby took rank second in estimation to her own fine boy!

Helen was much distressed that she could not repay now a portion of all the kind nursing she had received from her friend; but this was impossible, and Louisa would probably visit her again, before she herself were able to go out. Mrs. Mowbray, however, quieted her anxiety by constant visits to the Contessa, who had taken a firm hold on her affections, ever since she had witnessed her kindness and attachment to her daughter. Ah! how little we know what golden qualities lie hid behind a seemingly frivolous exterior—how little care we take to search them out—how prone

we are to pass rash judgments! So now Mrs. Mowbray often reproached herself with hastiness in the early estimation she had formed of Louisa's real disposition.

Castelbianco was all amiability and attention to his papa and mamma-in-law, and as soon as his wife's health freed them from anxiety, he was at Mr. Mowbray's beck and call to act the part of cicerone to every sight. Helen was pleased and grateful, and he, on his part reacted a portion of his old lover-like devotions, and filled her gentle heart with fond hopes for the future.

"Gaetano," she said one day when they were alone with the baby, and after Helen had, satisfactorily to herself, traced a strong resemblance between its tiny meaningless features and her husband's dark visage, "Gaetano, when shall little Helen be christened? She is nearly two months old, and though I could have wished to be at the ceremony, I do not like to delay longer; it makes me feel uneasy!"

"Oh! bella mia," he answered hurriedly, "the child is quite healthy, and we can still wait: as I could not go with it to the christening, I should like *you* to be there."

"But it might be performed at home, — my illness would be a sufficient reason!"

"Oh! che no—don't think of it, Elena! A Protestant ceremony in this house with Mammà and Don Dominico present! You are mad."

"Dear Gaetano, don't be angry," said poor Helen, whose weak state sent the tears to her eyes at these brusque words. "I did not wish to vex you—we can put it off; it shall be as you wish."

"Perdonami, Elena. I forgot myself; but we had better wait till you are stronger, *te l'assicuro!*" and so saying, he stooped and kissed her pale brow, and with a slight notice of the infant — lying quietly asleep in its

mother's arms, all unconscious of the mental torment it occasioned its father — the Prince hastened out of the room.

Helen embraced her child passionately, and wept long through weakness and disappointment.

When Mrs. Mowbray returned from visiting the Contessa, she was surprised at the sudden change in her daughter, who had been that morning stronger and better than usual; but though she saw that she had been weeping much, she could get no reason for her tears, and therefore forbore to tease her with further questionings.

In the meantime Castelbianco had rushed from his wife's room and from the house in no very placable frame of mind: day by day he expected the truth to come out; the disclosure hung like Damocles' sword, suspended by a hair, ready to fall and annihilate all his hopes! Acting on his first resolutions, he had, after the conversation with Mr. Mowbray, sought out his mother, and, cautiously feeling his way, had hinted the desirableness of making no allusion to the private baptism of the child, in order that the ceremony might be again gone through with more *éclat* for the honour of the family — a reason which he well knew the old lady would regard as unanswerable.

“*Hai ragione figlio*, Donna Teresa Carlotti, was here the other day, and she said what a pity the nurse and priest had been in such a hurry, for the child was not more delicate than others of a day old; and the old Marchesa Danede, who was present with her daughter, told me they acted towards the latter just the same, because they thought the baby would die; and yet there she was grown up, and a mother herself — who could have expected it!”

"And so you have told all these chattering people about our domestic affairs?" asked Gaetano, as the thundercloud gathered and rested darkly on his brow. His mother, startled at his tone, looked up frightened, but answered sharply, —

"*Mi pare* that I have a right to talk about what I like to my friends; and as to their *chattering*, I doubt whether they are worse than your beautiful English relations! They talk like Christians at any rate, which is more than can be said of those wretched heretics. Donna Teresa, who is a *santa donna*, quite pitied my hard lot in seeing my only son married to one of that accursed race."

But Gaetano arrested her words by a torrent of voluble wrath, and when fairly compelled to stop for want of breath he quitted the room, leaving the Principessa to pour her troubles into the sympathising ears of Don Dominico.

Thus it was hopeless to attempt concealment longer. Castalbiano knew too well that any mite of news communicated by his mother to her bosom friend was speedily published to the world at large, for the Neapolitans are like the Athenians of old, who "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing."

Padre Calvi continued absent, neither were any of Castalbiano's efforts to ascertain his whereabouts successful. He was bound on some secret mission, but his return might be soon looked for; and though the Prince had no expectation that the priest would permit the child to be baptized according to Protestant rites, the private Roman Catholic ceremony being now so generally known, he still hoped to obtain permission to educate her in her mother's faith. The Holy Church

would gain neither profit nor credit under existing circumstances, whereas the baptism would be recognised in the English Church, and the wealth and property which the child would inherit through her mother might surely be turned to some useful and satisfactory account: else Castelbianco's parental authority would be at zero. It cut him to the heart to think of the money slipping out of his hands — what else had he married that milk-and-water creature for? He had displeased his family and his sovereign, had risked his liberty, and plunged himself into difficulties which he might never shake off — and all for what? Love? He ground his teeth with rage, and cursed the folly which had made him the football of a heretic woman and her relations!

A few days after the preceding little *scena*, the Principessina and her mother were together in Helen's pretty boudoir. The Italian spring was coming on apace, but while it gladdened the face of nature, and brightened the glorious view seen from the open window, the invalid's delicate frame suffered from the relaxing effects of the season, and her spirits were oppressed by a weight which she could in no wise shake off. She had now been a year married; and as she lay back on her couch silently watching the beautiful scenery, thought travelled back and lingered on all the events of the preceding twelve months — months which to her had been fraught with such mingled good and evil. She stayed not to inquire which had predominated, neither did she anticipate, as of old, a bright future. No, she had ceased to be a dreamer of dreams, but she blessed God for present peace, and as she did so her eyes sought the loving, careworn face of her mother — ah! what a comfort her presence and companionship were!

The air was perfumed by the orange trees in the garden beneath, and the soft breeze which filled the white sails of distant barques, entered the room and brought a shade of colour to Helen's pale cheeks. Her once lovely face was thin and drawn, no longer was she the joyous, light-hearted Helen Mowbray of old; but though only in her eighteenth year, she was now a woman, and, alas! a sad one.

Jones entered to announce that Padre Calvi had arrived, and asked to see the Principessina if she were well enough to receive him. The Prince was out, and he was anxious to inquire personally after her health.

Helen's face flushed for a passing moment. She had not encountered the priest since the fatal day from which her illness dated, and she now shrank from the meeting. *He* knew her one great grief — *his* eye had witnessed the cruel blow her husband had struck her. Oh! she dreaded seeing him, she must be so lowered in his opinion, such a mean, pitiful object of compassion; she could not bear the thought.

"Dearest Helen," said her mother, anxiously noting her sudden change of colour, "do not receive Padre Calvi now; you are tired, and unequal to the exertion."

For an instant she felt like a victim respited from an impending operation; but, knowing that the evil day could not be long delayed, she blamed herself for cowardice and assured her mother she felt quite well enough, and willing to see the visitor.

The priest soon entered and hastening towards her sofa, expressed, in a few kind, well-chosen words, all the pleasure he experienced at her amendment. She thanked him with a slight emotion that she could not entirely repress, seeing which he considerably turned

to Mrs. Mowbray, with whom he entered into pleasant chit-chat, thus affording Helen time to rally her composure ere he again addressed her.

He was so agreeable a companion, that, after the first awkwardness in meeting him was overcome, Helen felt cheered in listening to his flowing language and low voice, and she lay back attending to and sometimes joining in his conversation with her mother, which included most subjects of interest connected with Naples, and also frequent allusions to the Priory and its neighbourhood.

At the end of half an hour he rose to take leave, and expressed his fear lest he had tired her, but she reassured him, and told him with sincerity that his visit had been to her a pleasure. As he was quitting the room he turned round, saying,—

“I should like to see the baby—may I?”

“Oh yes,” answered Helen; “I think you will find a great improvement since you beheld her last.”

The nurse was summoned from an inner chamber, and delivering her charge to Jones, who was in attendance, retired.

“Indeed you are right; I can hardly believe this is the same child as the puny, sickly little creature I held in my arms nearly two months ago.”

Helen’s eyes brightened at these words; she felt all a mother’s gratification at hearing the grave priest mention his having noticed and caressed her poor delicate baby.

“Ah! Miss Marianina, I was wiser than your nurse when I told her I did not think you would die.”

“Heaven forbid she should die!” exclaimed the fond mother in alarm.

“Nay, there is little fear of it now, and I hope

sincerely that little Maria's mamma will soon be as strong and healthy as her baby."

"You must not call her Maria," said Helen, "for she is to be named after me."

Jones grew suddenly scarlet, and trembled so that the child became fretful. She turned away to conceal her countenance from her mistress, as she strove to motion to the priest to be silent. But he was looking away from the baby and did not perceive her mysterious signs.

"I don't understand you," he said, answering Helen's remark. "I do not remember that *Helen* was one of her names: what were they? Let me see."

"Papa wishes that she should be christened *Helen Mowbray*, that the old name may not die out."

The priest stared at her for a moment, and then said slowly and deliberately,—

"How can that be, seeing that her names—I remember them now—are *Maria, Concetta, Teresa*?"

Helen started up in a sitting posture, but, unable to speak, looked imploringly at her mother. The latter, dreading the effect of any over-excitement to her daughter, tried to caution the priest with her eyes as she prompted him.

"You mean perhaps that these names were thought of by the Prince, but he has since changed his mind in compliance with his wife's desire."

"No," replied Padre Calvi, "I mean what I say: when the nurse, expecting this infant momentarily to die, baptized it herself, she gave it her names, *Maria Concetta*. She afterwards informed me of what she had done, assigning the reason, and I confirmed the ceremony, adding the name of *Teresa* to the others, in compliance with the Principessa's desire—it being a family one."

"Gaetano, is this true?" inquired Helen feebly. He had just entered the room, and at a glance perceived that the crisis had arrived.

"*Elena carissima*," he exclaimed, "no one consulted me — I only knew it afterwards — I ——"

"Again deceived!" she cried bitterly. "You promised so fairly; you let me believe that my dearest wishes would be granted — oh! Gaetano, how could you be so cruel?"

"Elena," he exclaimed desperately, "you shall carry out your wishes; the child shall be educated as you and your parents desire: there is nothing to prevent that."

"*I forbid it!*" interrupted the priest sternly; then laying a hand on the poor baby, "This child is now a member of the Holy Church; in the name of that Church I claim it, and am bound to watch over both its eternal welfare and earthly instruction. Principe di Castelbianco, I dare you to educate your child in a heretic creed!" And he fixed his cold fathomless eyes on the Neapolitan, till the latter quailed beneath their power, and turned away trembling.

Helen had fainted.

CHAPTER X.

MR. MOWBRAY'S energy and determination allowed of no delay in obtaining the Papal dispensation which was to confirm and legalise his daughter's marriage. For Helen's sake also, and in the hope of insuring her some future peace, he acted liberally towards the Prince by volunteering to pay a large portion of his debts.

This Castelbianco at first feebly resisted by alleging that he had none, inwardly quaking the while lest his *suocero* should take him at his word, a fear of which he was quickly relieved when, to his discomfiture, Mr. Mowbray produced several written demands he had received from despairing claimants, who trusted that, for the honour of the family, the rich English *Milordo* would see them paid. Castelbianco then wisely pocketed the affront, and proceeded immediately to make piteous appeals to his "dear and estimable friend's" generosity, calling on every saint in the calendar to reward his open-handed and merciful liberality, &c. &c. Mr. Mowbray sickened at the fulsome language the Neapolitan employed, and peremptorily bade him refrain from so much hyperbole, and descend to business matters. He then stipulated that, if he satisfied the Prince's creditors, the latter must consent to Helen's own fortune being so tied up that it could not be dissipated on some future occasion to meet his wicked extravagance and folly. To this last measure he encountered some

opposition from the tender-hearted Helen, but he succeeded at last in making her take a more reasonable view of the case for her child's sake, while the Prince acquiesced silently, or rather sullenly, if the truth must be told. But he was afraid of losing the favour of his father-in-law, with present as well as the chance of future gain, and was conscious, moreover, that he had so compromised himself in the eyes of his wife and her family as to have no longer a right to make his own voice heard.

Mr. Mowbray never reproached his poor daughter, as some might have done, for her rash and senseless marriage, — never told her what sums he expended on her worthless husband for her dear sake. And Gaetano carefully shunned the disagreeable topic; but Helen noticed his buoyant spirits, and marked with pain his servile adulation and cringing devotion to the slightest wish expressed by either her father or her mother. Yet somehow all seemed to breathe more freely when he was absent from their circle; and he was rarely mentioned in conversation, from a secret conviction felt by each, though unexplained, that it would be dangerous ground.

Meanwhile the old Principessa's "bowels of compassion" were closed against the entire set of her heretic connections, and she was greatly angered by her son's attention to the Mowbrays, making no secret of her jealousy thereat. Since Helen had her own mother to look after her, the good lady did not trouble her head on that score; but she took kindly to the baby, and worried her daughter-in-law sadly, who would have it brought up, nursed, and clothed according to the most approved English fashions.

Loud was her wrath and great her dismay on per-

ceiving that the swaddling bands in which she had braced the poor infant during Helen's delirious state, were decidedly rejected on Mrs. Mowbray's arrival. A curved spine and bandy legs were the least of the evils she predicted as consequent on such madness, and she appealed vehemently to her son to interpose his parental authority against any such innovations. But he prudently refused to interfere, and also requested her acquiescence, for he felt it would be bad policy in him to oppose the Mowbrays in anything, even in the nurture of his own child. Thus the martyred baby was suffered to kick about its poor little limbs in peace, to its grandmamma's intense disgust and indignation.

The Mowbrays discovered immediately after their arrival that the Principessa's establishment was not calculated to afford them house room; consequently they took a separate apartment, though beneath the same roof, in order to be near their daughter, as there was no hotel in that quarter of the town. Mrs Mowbray, however, spent nearly all her time with Helen during the severity of her illness, and when the latter was permitted to leave her room they were likewise rarely divides.

As the warm weather approached it was settled that Helen should accompany her father and mother into the neighbourhood, really to afford her change of scene and air, but *nominally* that her parents might become acquainted with all the surrounding beauties. This prospect greatly cheered her drooping spirits, and the day was already fixed for their departure, accompanied by the baby, Castelfranco promising to pay them frequent flying visits, when a sudden unexpected event changed their plans and altered all the current of their thoughts.

This was the illness of the old Principessa. She had caught a severe cold one blustering March day that had been fixed for the races at the Campo. Like the rest of the *beau monde*, she had passed several hours in an open carriage exposed to the severe heat of the sun and the cutting blasts of an east wind, the usual characteristics of this trying month at Naples. In spite of such drawbacks it is the period commonly selected for the races, and the brilliancy and excitement of the scene serve to conceal the sickness and disease which lurk beneath the surface, for many are the illnesses consequent on these occasions.

The Principessa returned home late; the sun had set, and the wind whistled and blew with unrivalled power, penetrating the thickest furs and wraps. A cold was the consequence, which, however, was not thought much of at the time, and the old lady was considered quite convalescent after being bled in the hand and well dosed with *tisane*.

At Naples the Sangrado practice is in full force, though as used by the natives it is not very alarming. The barber is the *surgeon in ordinary*, and is always summoned even when leeches have to be applied; many foreign medical men give in to this custom, and do not interfere with the duties of his calling by officiating themselves with the lancet. Neapolitans are generally bled in the hand or foot; the limb is immediately placed in warm water, and when this is slightly tinged the wound is plastered and bandaged up. Even infants in arms are subjected to this sovereign cure for all maladies, and one often sees their poor little hands tied up with black riband. This process, however, did not prove effectual with the Principessa, who could not rid herself of a teasing cough, which she increased one

night at the opera, where, by some mischance, she was kept waiting a long time for her carriage.

“ We dally idly with the darts of Death :
Wet, dry, cold, heat, at the appointed hour,
All act subservient to the tyrant's power ;
And when obedient Nature knows his will,
A fly, a grapestone, or a hair can kill.”

A violent inflammation ensued, and then great was the concourse of doctors, multifarious the leeches, bleedings, and warm baths, resorted to by each and all, till the patient's strength was sorely reduced, though the temporary relief derived from such suicidal treatment made her crave for its continuance.

Helen, forgetting instantly and entirely all the unkindnesses she had experienced at her mother-in-law's hands, was constant and devoted in her attendance at her bedside, and, careless of her own delicate health, strove, with all the gentleness and thoughtfulness of her sweet nature, to smooth the sick woman's pillow and relieve her sufferings. At first she met with little acknowledgment for her pains, ceaseless complaining and fretfulness tried her patience sorely; but she persevered with constancy, for duty and charity both called her plainly to the work.

She entreated her husband, almost with tears, to call in other and more able advice, for she had no faith in the Neapolitan practitioners, and viewed their lowering system as applied to the invalid with real alarm. But Gaetano, though really anxious and distressed about his mother's state, careless and selfish as he was on most matters, had yet full confidence in the native doctors, and when, to quiet Helen, he consented to ask his mother to consult a Frenchman, he was neither surprised nor vexed at her impatient refusal.

Truly, in all medical matters the Neapolitans are a century behind most other countries, and the systems and treatments of disease still hold firm root there, which prevailed in England during the days of our great-grandmothers—of simples and potions celebrity.

Yes, Gaetano was anxious about his mother, and gave her all the unremitting attention due from a son: with all their faults, filial duty is never wanting amongst Neapolitans. A son, though in possession of his deceased father's title and property, is scrupulous in paying all honour to his surviving parent as the real head of the house, during whose lifetime his own wife is always a secondary personage in the household. We have seen married women of the highest rank reverently kiss their mother's hand in public, and similar homage is paid to them by their sons. This may appear to English eyes inconsistent with the love, and almost *friendship*, existing between some parents and children; but, alas! are we not likewise prone to run to the other extreme, so that even the much despised Neapolitans may one day rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us?

It soon became evident that the Principessa was sinking fast, and that no hopes could be entertained of her recovery.

One morning soon after this was known, Helen sat alone by the sufferer's bedside, pale and weary both in body and mind. She fancied the Principessa was sleeping or unconscious, for latterly she had taken no notice of those about her, and appeared to be constantly in a lethargic state. Helen rested her arms upon the bed, supporting her aching head, and some little time thus passed in prayer and meditation ere she looked towards the patient. When she did so, she was

surprised to see her eyes fixed upon her in a conscious, even kindly gaze, and rising from her seat she bent over her with an expression of pleasure.

"Elena," whispered the old woman feebly, "I am dying, — I know it."

"But you are better to-day, I think, and Dr. L—— will say the same, perhaps, when he sees this improvement."

"No, figlia, no; l'ora è giunta, e sia fatta la volontà di Dio!" and she closed her eyes and was silent for a few minutes.

Helen gave her a spoonful of some cordial, and then arranged her fevered pillows. When she had done this, the old woman spoke again.

"Figlia, sei una buona ragazza; I have been often cross, even unjust to you, but you have never given me a vexed word in return. Iddio te lo rimeriti!"

Helen's eyes filled with tears, and, stooping, she kissed the thin hand that lay on the coverlet.

"I have tried to do right by you and Gaetano," she said; "and when I have failed, it has not been from a want of good-will, but from being a stranger to the customs of this country. But you forgive me now?"

"Figlia mia, I have nothing to forgive. I was jealous of you at first, because I thought you would rob me of my son's affections. I was wrong; you have never come between us, and you have been a good wife to him — ay, better than he deserves."

Helen's lips trembled; she would have spoken, but her emotion prevented her, and she feared exciting the Principessa.

"Ah, Madonna Santissima! he has been a great *guai* to me!" and her wasted fingers worked restlessly about the bed as she clutched the clothes.

"Madre, he loves you, I am certain ; do not fear."

"Si, figlia, I know he loves me; but he has been often wild, very wild. But I must see him. Why is he not here? Why does he leave me?" she continued with sudden impatience.

"He was here but a few moments since, while you slept; but I will call him directly," and Helen rang the bell.

"Elena, Elena!"

She returned to the bedside. "Dammi un bacio, figlia—I will speak to him for you. Iddio ti benedica!"

Helen kissed the old woman's face; then as her husband entered the room she quitted it, and retiring to her own chamber gave vent to her feelings in tears. She was touched by the Princess's acknowledgment—however tardy—of good-will towards her. It repaid the poor girl for many heart-aches and much discouragement, and she thanked God that she had nothing to reproach herself with in her conduct to her mother-in-law. At the end of half an hour she returned to the sick room, but on the way she encountered her husband, who told her the confessor was engaged with the dying woman.

Gaetano seemed much softened by the interview he had just had with his mother; and as Helen strove to give him some words of comfort, he twined his arm round her waist and kissed her fondly, while his eyes filled with tears.

"She has bid me take care of my little Elena, for she says you have been kind to her—povera madre!"

They waited some time, and then, hearing the confessor's heavy tread in the ante-room, Helen again approached the sick chamber. She passed Don Dominico and Padre Calvi, who were conversing together in

whispers; each saluted her with respect, but silently, and hurrying by them she had hold of the handle of the bedroom door, when a hand quietly interfered to prevent her opening it. She looked up and saw Padre Calvi.

"Do you want me? I would rather not stay now," she said.

"Excuse me, Signora Principessina, but it is better for you not to go in there."

"Nay, but the Principessa will be expecting me," and again she strove to enter. The priest placed himself before her.

"Daughter, she does not expect you: she has made her peace with God, and has had absolution. We are waiting for the arrival of the Holy Sacrament, that she may receive also the last offices of the Church. The Principessa may no longer see those of another communion."

"But, Padre Calvi, I will not interfere with her religion; I wish only to be at hand to nurse and attend on her as before."

"Daughter, we have told her that she must not disturb the holy peace and calm she now enjoys by intercourse with one of a heretic faith, and she acquiesces meekly in the Church's ordinances."

"Am I not to see her again, then?"

"It is better so."

"Gaetano, do you hear? Am I indeed to be forbidden to approach your mother, lest I should pollute her?"

"Hush, Elena, neither you nor I may oppose the dictates of the Holy Church! You have already bid one another farewell, and she has kissed and blessed you. Come away, bella mia;" and he led her to her own room.

She was hurt, grieved: she did not weep or lament,

but knelt long by her baby's cot silent and motionless. At length it awoke and began to cry: this roused her, and taking the child in her arms she walked about the room hushing it in a low voice, while the feel of the precious burden she clasped to her bosom made the gathering tears trickle fast down her pale cheeks. "Ay, that dying woman has Gaetano to soothe *her* last moments, but *I* ——? Will this child be separated from *my* death-bed for fear of my contaminating her? Oh! baby, dear baby, may you never guess the tears and grief you have cost your poor mother?" She kissed it convulsively, passionately, till Mrs. Mowbray's entrance made her restrain her feelings; for she jealously endeavoured to conceal from her all knowledge of her heart-griefs.

Soon the regular ringing of silver hand-bells announced the approach of the Host, escorted by men bearing silver lanterns; one also carried a censer, and another the small tabernacle in which the sacred elements were to be placed. The priest, bareheaded, conveyed them now concealed from view, while an attendant held the scarlet and gilt shade over his head. As the procession entered the Palazzo all the bystanders knelt, and while the ringers stayed below with the lantern-bearers, the rest ascended the stairs and proceeded to the sick chamber. There they remained some time, for extreme unction was being administered; meanwhile Helen and her mother waited together in the former's room, and prayed for mercy on the departing soul.

At length they heard the bells sound again, and the procession depart repeating aloud prayers for the sick, and then Gaetano entered with a pale hurried countenance, followed by Jones, who, with an indescribable look on her face, began to collect some of her mistress' clothes.

"Elena, I have desired Jones to pack up a few things for you to take with you into the country. My mother is sinking fast, and the house will not be fit for you to stay in for the next few days. I shall follow you directly all is over, and meanwhile Mrs. Mowbray will doubtless accompany you."

"Oh! Gaetano, how can I go away at such a moment? your mother may still linger several hours, perhaps days; besides, I must be here to provide any nourishment she may need."

"She may not touch anything now that the Holy Sacrament has passed her lips, not even a drop of water."

Helen stood horror-stricken.

"You can do no good by staying," he continued; "in our country it is customary to quit the house of death, and as the body will lie in state, you will have neither privacy nor quiet here. Therefore you had better start this evening, and change of air will, I hope, bring back some colour to those pale cheeks."

He spoke in a tone which allowed of no opposition, and Helen offered none; but her English opinions of what was right and proper in such emergencies were sorely outraged!

That night the Mowbrays and their daughter departed by the last train for Castellammare. Helen, however, insisted on leaving her own maid behind, in case her services should be needed in the sick chamber; not that it was likely they would be accepted, because Neapolitans are wedded to their own practices and habits in everything, and these differ totally from ours in most cases. But Jones was blessed with common sense, besides being a kind nurse, and as she was on friendly terms with the household in general, her

thoughtfulness and authority might do some good at such a season of confusion.

The following night, Gaetano reached the Albergo Reale. All was over: the Palazzo Castelbianco at Naples was in the hands of priests, reciting masses for the dead, while their underlings were clothing the walls with gloomy trappings of woe. All such funeral paraphernalia at Naples is provided by the churches and confraternities, and is not the business of private undertakers as with us. The high rank and large connections of the deceased called for a grand funeral and lying in state, and great were the preparations accordingly. But alas! what a mockery of grief it is, thus to bedizen the senseless clay, and convey it to the charnel-house surrounded by nodding plumes and velvet hangings! A costly interment is considered a proper respect to the dead forsooth,—how much rather is it a heartless exhibition of the vanity and riches of the living! Oh! if it be allowed to the purified spirit to behold such a work, must it not be with sorrow?—could sorrow find entrance within the portals of light.

Ah! no, let us bury our dead quietly, decently, reverently, out of our sight, for it should be a season of grief and humiliation to the surviving, and not one of parade. Dust we are, and unto dust shall we return; our earthly burden and cross comes home to each one of us then, and what heart so cold and so hard, as not to shiver and quail at the awful presence that has come amongst us, always suddenly, always unexpectedly?

Jones followed a day or two later; as her mistress was to spend the summer months in the country, she had to make the necessary arrangements which the late sad event had delayed. When she entered Helen's

presence, she could not refrain from giving utterance to the thoughts that filled her mind.

"Oh! my dear lady, and you also, Madam, (turning to Mrs. Mowbray who was in the room), I am glad you did not stay at the house!—such a scene as there is there!"

"What do you mean, Jones?" asked Helen.

"Oh! my lady, the house has been all turned upside down. Carpenters and *facchini* are in every room, hanging up black velvet; and there are three altars in the large dining-room,—that's where they have erected the grand bier. And they have dressed up the poor body in her wedding gown with white gloves and satin shoes, and laid it there for the rabble to go in and stare at; while a lot of priests take it by turn to say mass—as they call it—at one or other of the altars, and Donna Carmela (the Princess' maid), and some hired women with her, sit by the body all dressed in black, with long veils."

Helen shuddered at the thought of such a raree show, and was indeed thankful to be away from it.

"Ah! my lady, but that isn't all; while they were getting the rooms in order, the poor lady was laid on the floor in a corner * all of a heap, before they dressed her up, and when I found her there, I was so angry,—I never felt so angry in all my life! But when I spoke about it, the people said the poor lady was out of their way there. Where else could they put her till the *catafalco*, as they called it, was ready?"

"Oh! Jones, is it possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Mowbray, to whom Neapolitan practices were new.

"Yes, Ma'am, I thought you and my lady would be

* A fact.

shocked if you knew it; so though the old Princess was never very friendly to me, still I couldn't bear to see the poor body lie on the ground anyhow, so I called Maria, the housemaid, and we placed her on a mattress in another room, and covered her over tidily with a sheet."

"Oh! that was right, quite right. Thank you, Jones!" for Helen was horrified at such indignities being offered to her husband's mother.

"I did what I could for the poor lady also before she died. When I saw the priest leave her room for a short time, I got in quietly, and Donna Carmela didn't say anything, so I tidied the bed and made the chamber comfortable; it was in such a litter, my lady. Then the Prince came in, and he didn't send me away, but seemed pleased, I thought, to see me attend to the poor lady."

"Oh! I am sure he would wish you to be kind to the Princess," cried Helen, with tearful eyes at such an account.

"Then Donna Carmela wanted to get a rest, and asked me to stay and watch, which I did; but just then Don Dominico returned. He looked very black at me, and inquired what I was doing there; but the Prince answered for me that the maid had left for a short time, and he wished me to remain. Well, I saw the Princess's lips move, and she whispered something which I tried to catch, and I am sure it was water, — *acqua*. So I quietly got some milk, and was going to wet her mouth, for she could hardly swallow, I knew, and I saw her eyes brighten, when the priest catches hold of my arm and makes me spill some. 'Donna,' he says, 'what are you going to do with that?'

"'Her Ladyship asked for some drink,' I answered.

"'You mustn't give nothing,' he said, 'after the Blessed Sacrament has passed her lips!' All the time the poor lady was watching me and moving her hand about, as if wanting the drink. So I asked the Prince if I mightn't give her some; but he only covered his face with his hands, and hurried out of the room without a word."

Helen was almost beside herself at such a recital! Jones was frightened at her excitement, and became suddenly silent, thinking, and rightly too, that she had better not have recounted such a history of bigotry and inhumanity. Mrs. Mowbray was too shocked to speak, but tears of compassion for the sufferings of the dead, who had been so cruelly treated in her last moments, bedewed her cheeks. We may hope that the poorest pauper in happy England is less barbarously treated on his death-bed!

At length Helen desired Jones to finish her story, and tell her everything without reserve.

"I am afraid I forgot myself, my lady," Jones began, hesitating as she spoke, "but I was desperate, and my conscience would have reproached me to my dying day had I refused the poor lady's last request; so I told the old priest he was a brute and a monster, and I should make his conduct known to you, my lady, and that I knew how horrified and angry you would be. He talked very big with a lot of words I couldn't understand, but I fancy he was rather ashamed of himself; for at last, when he saw he couldn't frighten me out of my duty, he said he should leave the room not to be witness to any such heretic wickedness, seeing that the Prince didn't support him. Then he went off in a tantrum, and I shut the door after him. I did what I could for the poor lady, and gave her the milk, and her

eyes quite thanked me, — they did, I am sure! She died an hour after, and the Prince was so kind as to say he was obliged to me, but the confessor looked at me as black as thunder!

“God bless you, Jones,” said Helen, greatly agitated, “I thank you, also, for I think you did right.” And the faithful, true-hearted attendant quitted the room, leaving her mistress to ponder on her sad narrative, and be more than ever shocked and disgusted with the heartless bigotry of southern Italy.

Verily, many of the superstitions of Buddhism find a parallel in the present day in the annals of Romanism! — “Romanism built on Paganism.” Such it is even in this nineteenth century of ours! Indian mothers, in their total darkness, cast their infants adrift on the sacred waters of the Ganges to conciliate the favour of their dread idol, while their Sicilian sisters, who profess Christianity, suspend *their* offspring in mid-air beneath a burning sun, to revolve slowly around their god — Santa Rosalia!

In both climes the lives of the little sufferers are equally risked; but the smooth, flowing waters provide an easier death than the fiery rays of “the greater light,” which pour down like a burning flood on those innocent young heads!

The unhappy widow, who, if not absolutely enjoined the sacrifice by the sacred books of the Hindoos, is yet compelled by public opinion and the certainty of being branded with universal contempt, should she shrink from fulfilling the horrid custom of her country, is not more the slave of a blind superstition, when, after being first partially stupified, she ascends the funeral pile — her despairing cries drowned by the shouts of the exultant mob and the crash of music — than is the “Bride

of Heaven," whom gratified parents and covetous priests consign to a living tomb! Nominally, she may retract at the eleventh hour; virtually, she is prevented by the certainty of disgrace—perhaps ill-usage!

Read the histories of noted saints,—of St. Francis of Assisi, who preached to ducks and geese, called the swallows his sisters, and the brutes his brothers; Saint Simon Stylites, who for thirty years made the summit of a column his habitation, and passed those years in making rapid bows—so rapid as almost to defy enumeration!—Saint Catherine of Cardone, who, like Nebuchadnezzar, "did eat grass as oxen," and others too numerous to name: all alike revelling in dirt, and zealously shunning the decencies of life!

Are these less foolish, less fanatical, than those poor heathens, who, fastening a sharp hook into their flesh, suspend themselves to a rope, and are thus whirled round in mid-air? or others who cast themselves beneath the car of Juggernaut? or even the followers of Mahomet, who, at a religious festival prostrate themselves to the earth, that the Sheik, mounted on a prancing steed, may traverse their hodies?

CHAPTER XI.

CASTELLAMMARE was as usual filled with foreigners and the *beau monde* of Naples, which yearly seeks a nominal retreat from the restraints of fashion and society amid its shady woods. Helen kept as much aloof from these gay butterflies as was practicable, both on account of her mourning and for the sake of her health, which had been severely tried during the previous winter.

Her illness in all its details, and the stories which had been fabricated concerning it, founded partly on truth, but more on imagination — the matter of the dispensation, and other family concerns, which Helen little thought would afford interest to the gossiping world of Naples — had, nevertheless, during a temporary dearth of scandal, been eagerly seized by those vultures yclept *fashionables*, and devoured, either entire and unadorned, or first dissected piece-meal, and then served up with *sauce piquante* to suit their vitiated palates.

Happily for our poor heroine, she knew nought of this, nor had she any kind friend to enlighten her ignorance on the subject ; otherwise the fact of having been talked about during one whole carnival might perhaps have gratified her vanity, if we may judge by the anxiety some people display to bring their names before the elegant public ! “What a dust we flies make,” is the motto adopted by these ambitious folk, who, in obedience to their aspirations,

“Are sure to make their follies known.”

Under the beneficial influence of country air, Helen's strength soon sufficiently rallied to admit of her enjoying many donkey rides over the hills, when she even ascended the precipitous side of Monte St. Angelo, to feast her eyes on the glorious scenery which from thence was spread out to view.

On this mountain, which is one of the highest, if not *the* highest, of the Apennine chain, the Neapolitans lay up their chief stock of frozen snow in winter, against the summer demand for this necessary of life—for such it is in that hot climate. The first fall of snow sees the peasants busy as ants—regardless of weather or the severe temperature—collecting the treasure by every available means, and transporting it to prepared store-houses, if we may call them so. These are either natural cavities, or else places hollowed out for the purpose in the rock in narrow glens, shaded from the sun, and as low down the mountain as the temperature will admit of, to facilitate the subsequent removal of the snow for sale. These great receptacles, when filled, the whole pressed down hard and tight, are covered over thickly with straw, branches, and leaves, which effectually close the mouths of the caves, and exclude light and air. When sold by retail vendors at Naples, the price of snow is ridiculously small; a penny a pound, or five *grani* the *rotolo* of two pounds, is reckoned dear by the natives, because in the country the price is just *half*, there being a heavy duty on its importation into the capital. Sometimes it is clean and pure, at others mixed with particles of earth and dead leaves, but as one must always take what comes uppermost, no choice is allowed by the trade, and after all, the dirt itself is only “clean dirt.”

How much we English lose in not appreciating the

luxury of ice and snow! With the whole of our country wrapped annually in a thick white mantle, our hot days in summer,—for we do have hot days sometimes, if not in the memorable year 1860!—might be rendered very enduring by a cheap and easy process. Iced fruits, butter, water, and wines, would then be no longer luxuries for the rich, but likewise attainable by poorer individuals. Fruit ices might then be reduced in price, and it were well if their quantity were increased in inverse ratio; for it is often a puzzle to us why in “a land flowing with milk,” and consequently cream, with plenty of cheap raspberries and strawberries, one is always served with such a meagre thimbleful of this dainty! Learn of the Neapolitans, oh ye confectioners!—for they, with neither green fields nor what you would call *bonâ fide* cream, yet—imitating Molière’s French cook, who could make a good dinner out of nothing—contrive to furnish ices, the size of a half-pound of butter, for the moderate sum of fourpence! Perhaps you may take a hint from a remark once made to us concerning a celebrated *sorbettiere* in the Strada di Chiaja: “I wonder what B—— can want with the cart-loads of *lard* that are left at his shop?”

What a long digression from Castellammare and our friends! True, reader, but as we are almost Neapolitans ourselves, the subject runs away with us, and in this roast-beef-and-plum-pudding-land, we at times see visions of abundant *acqua fresca* and *sorbetti*, even as the thirsty traveller in the desert pants to attain the cooling stream in the far distance. Alas! ’tis but a mirage in both cases!

During the early part of their *villeggiatura*, Castellabianco was content to remain quietly at Castellammare,

where he not unfrequently joined the reunions that daily took place at one or other of the villas occupied for the season by the ambassadors, and by natives or foreigners of distinction. From these, as we have already said, Helen kept aloof; her baby and her parents were all the society she then coveted. Occasionally, however, her husband went over to Naples to look after some business consequent on his mother's death, which, he said, required his personal attention. These absences gradually became more frequent, more lengthened, till at last his presence amongst them was the exception.

" 'Tis ever common,
That men are merriest when they are from home."

Helen had begun fondly to hope for better things. His manner had assumed so much of its old kindness when under the softening influence of sorrow, that her spirits and hopes had risen alike, now apparently only to be again cruelly disappointed. The Principessa had left her property equally divided between her children, and this inheritance, together with Mr. Mowbray's assistance, raised the Prince considerably above the frowns of Fortune, so that he felt much too elated to lead a moping country life when exhilarated by such sudden prosperity. In his consequent good humour he undertook to have many improvements carried out in the household, and went so far as to solicit Helen's opinion on various changes in their apartments; this evinced a desire to gratify her wishes and taste. But alas! at the same time he hinted casually his intention again to join the race club, and mentioned his having commissioned a noted horse-dealer abroad to purchase for him several valuable animals.

His wife's heart sank within her, but she endeavoured earnestly, though with her usual gentleness, to dissuade him from this course, which she knew full well would lead to disastrous consequences.

"Orsù, Elena!" was the snappish reply; "if you have plenty of carriages and horses for yourself, and *carte blanche* for your Parisian toilette, you need not grudge me my *divertimenti*! I only do what is expected of every noble of my rank. Via! non mi assordare le orecchie con più ciarle."

Helen could say no more, but she tried to hope and believe that he would be more cautious in future—taught by his late difficulties and deliverance. But caution and judgment formed no part of the Prince's character. His vanity flattered by the admiration and applause he received from those *friends* who followed him for what they could get—his ambition roused to take a leading part in the *fast* and fashionable set—his conscience (if he really possessed such an article) quieted by arguing that he should certainly make money, and so be enabled to shake off entirely all remaining encumbrances,—with such multifarious inducements to extravagance the Principe di Castelbianco made ready for the ensuing winter campaign, while his young wife remained in her country seclusion with

"That feeling of sadness and longing,
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only,
As the mist resembles rain."

At length, however, a change became desirable. The Court took up its residence at Quisisana, and immediately a large portion of the woods were tabooed ground. No *gentles* must intrude in the neighbourhood of majesty, and great was the general indignation at the

edict — and no wonder! With no resort for walks and rides but these very woods and the palace garden, it was not a little hard to be excluded from both at once. That the palace should be kept private was natural, but the woods — ah! that was *tutt' altro*! And thereupon most of the indignant, discomfited visitors packed up their trunks, and betook themselves to Sorrento — the Mowbrays and their daughter amongst others.

They went to the Hôtel Rispoli, commanding one of the best situations at Sorrento; a modest little building standing in a pleasant garden, whose convenient position and attentive landlord made it a favourite with travellers. At the extremity of the garden, and on the brink of a precipice, stood a delightful summer-house, where one could breakfast *al fresco* in the early morning, sheltered from the sun, but with full enjoyment of the glorious sea view stretching before one. Here there was ever a balmy breeze to fan the heated air of noontide, while the adjoining orange grove gave forth its perfume, at once so potent and so delicious. But this sweet little retreat was already doomed. Rispoli, one fortunate day, had discovered some old foundations surrounding it, and he immediately resolved to profit by them. Upon these he subsequently erected a large commodious house, which is now decidedly the best and pleasantest hotel in that neighbourhood. It stands on the site of the pretty pavilion, and from its windows one looks down on the blue waters that spread their glassy surface far beneath; here no sound disturbs the peaceful quiet, save the soft splash of waves against the rocks, or their ripple on the sandy coves that form the bathing ground. Occasionally the fishermen's distant voices are heard calling to one another at the little landing place of Sorrento, or a wild

sailor's song comes fitfully across the waters from the deck of some tiny yacht riding gracefully at anchor.

At Sorrento the Mowbrays sought the peaceful retirement so necessary to Helen's health, while the pure sea bathing she there obtained, so different to that which the foul waters of Naples afford, helped greatly to invigorate her delicate frame.

One morning as she wandered beneath the orange-trees, carrying her little girl, and, with all a mother's pride, discovering every moment fresh wonders of intelligence and quickness in her treasure, the merry tinkle of horses' bells made the child crow and dance with gleeful delight. The Princess drew nearer to the gate to gratify baby, and saw the arrival of a carriage, from which the Contessa di Malafede was in the act of descending, accompanied by her child and its nurse. The friends met with real pleasure and with some wonder on Helen's part.

"Ah! I thought I should take you by surprise, and I see I have succeeded."

"Yes, indeed; for when I left Naples you said you should remain there all the summer."

"So I intended then, but finding that I sadly needed a sight of your dear little face, and thinking baby required a change, I started off, as I do everything, without stopping to think twice about it. But I can only pay a flying visit, I am sorry to say."

"Has the Count accompanied you?" asked Helen.

"Oh, dear no, I can never get him to move. I almost think if the house caught fire he would not make the exertion of leaving it! Change of air would have done him good, I am sure. By the way, Helen, you won't recognise him on your return, for he is actually letting his beard grow!"

"I thought beards were not looked upon favourably at Naples?"

"Well, I believe they are not, and I told the Count so, but he finds it a bore to have the barber every morning to shave him (fancy an Englishman with the use of both hands being shaved by a barber, Helen!), and therefore prefers the dirty appendage of a beard. It always makes me sick to see a bearded hero go through the process of dining, and Neapolitans, who are never particular on this score at the best of times, defy all imagination when thus adorned," and Louisa spoke with a touch of her old sarcasm.

But her tone suddenly changed and softened greatly as she drew her friend's attention to her baby son, and asked her opinion on his looks. Helen could truthfully assure her that he appeared to be the picture of health, and she only wished her own child would grow as stout and rosy.

"And yet, though he looks so well, I cannot get him to be merry and cheerful like other children. He is extremely good, quite a pattern baby as to not crying, but I want him to show more animation."

"You forget, Louisa, how young he is, only four or five months—which is it? My pet is six months—quite an elder sister!" And Helen took her friend's child from the nurse, and danced away with it, singing a merry song.

Louisa looked wistfully after them. Her restless, unhappy character had found peace in maternal love; this child filled the void in her heart, and made her once more a tender woman, ready to give vent to all the affectionate impulses of her real nature. Night and day she blessed Heaven for the gift, and prayed for guidance in the nurture and subsequent teaching of her child.

"I think he is rather shy of me," said Helen, returning shortly, and giving her charge to the attendant, "but we shall soon become better acquainted, I dare say."

"This little being is not shy, at all events," exclaimed Louisa, amusing Helen's child with a bunch of orange blossoms; and both those fair young mothers laughed happily while they watched the infant's bright face as it tossed and jumped itself in its nurse's arms.

"But come, Louisa, we will go into the house and find mamma, she will be very glad to see you."

"And how came you to leave Castellammare?" asked the Contessa, as she partook of a summer repast of fruits and *ricotta* in Helen's apartment. "Do you know that I proceeded straight to the Albergo Reale, expecting to find you there, and had only to descend that dreadful hill again for my pains, for I was determined to lose no time in following you?"

"We were driven away by the arrival of the King," said Mrs. Mowbray. "The place became most disagreeable, as we were directly shut out from nearly all the walks and rides; a very arbitrary proceeding, and quite worthy of an absolute sovereign."

"Besides," continued Helen, "we thought Sorrento would be quieter and more like real country. There were such gaiety-loving individuals at the other place, and we never went out for a ride on our donkeys, without encountering a host of these votaries of fashion."

Louisa laughed merrily.

"Oh, you poor little Helen! And so you ran away from Castellammare only to fall into the lion's mouth!"

"How so?"

"Why, *chère amie*, you fled from royalty at the one place, to come to its very stronghold. The Conte

d'A—— has a beautiful villa here; the Conte di S—— also favours the place with his august presence, and in fact travelled in the same railway carriage with myself this very morning."

Helen's countenance showed all the vexation she experienced.

"He was amiability personified, made particular inquiries after your ladyship, and expressed himself charmed on learning what near neighbours you would be, for at the time I believed you were at Castellammare."

"Oh! Louisa, why did you tell him I was in this vicinity?"

"Pourquoi pas? Even if I had not told him, you would have been certain to meet. Truth to say, I did not feel very delighted, on entering the railway carriage, to see it already occupied by such company. His Royal Highness was smoking, but first asking me if I disliked the fumes, he then, without waiting for a reply, threw the cigar out of window. He was only accompanied by T——."

"Perhaps he will not remain long," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Let us hope so, for these two royal worthies usually make the place ring with their doings, and render it little desirable as a residence for decent people."

It chanced that the very next day, as Helen and the Contessa were driving together on the beautiful high road, their carriage was forced suddenly to draw up on one side, to afford room for a large party of donkey riders to pass. Many of the equestrians uttered laughing salutations as they rushed by, and the two ladies then recognised several of the Naples *notables*.

"Look out, Helen," whispered her companion, "here comes the lion, for I see his red mane!"

In fact the Conte di S—— appeared in the centre of the merry throng, carried by several panting bearers in a *portantino*. Too weighty for a donkey, and a carriage being very useless at Sorrento, His Royal Highness usually selected this mode of conveyance, as more suited to his ponderous frame, however distressing it might be to his *facchini*.

On perceiving the ladies he instantly stopped, and evinced and expressed his pleasure at the meeting—a sentiment which they by no means shared in an equal degree.

The Count was charmed to find that the Princess was no longer an inmate of the sick room, and trusted that she would not delay to brighten society with her presence.

Helen hastened to damp his ardour by declaring she was still under medical *régime*, and enjoined to lead a most regular and humdrum life during her *villeggiatura*. She greatly dreaded his being amiably inclined,—a circumstance which would be far from desirable at any time, but much more so now that she had not the protection of her husband's presence.

"Doctors are merciless barbarians!" he exclaimed. "However, no such objection holds good with you, Madame la Comtesse, and I shall hope, therefore, to see you join us." And the sensual face brightened as his eyes rested with evident admiration on the handsome Contessa.

"Altesse Royale, I am only a bird of passage at Sorrento; I came to see my friend, la Princesse de Castelbianco, for a day or two, after which, I return to my husband."

"We shall meet, then, at Naples," the Count returned somewhat more coldly; then politely bowing, he

took his leave, and the strange, unroyal-looking, *cortège* resumed its quick march.

The apartments of the hotel were well filled at the period that our friends were there; but most of the occupants were constantly fluctuating, being travellers, zealously bent on *doing* the country and all the sights. Consequently, they rushed hither and thither with praiseworthy diligence, filled their brains with as many pages of "Murray's Handbook" as they could conveniently hold, and then started for some other place, to go through the same process. This must be real hard work, and it is to be hoped, when they *do* afterwards rest from such toil in their far-away homes, these travellers are able to recollect and classify, at least a *portion* of what they have seen.

What extreme mental relief these good people appear to enjoy when they tell you, with a sigh of satisfaction, —

"We have *done* the Museum this morning — how very tiresome that it is only open till two o'clock in the afternoon! — and yesterday we visited the churches. But we have seen those of Rome, and the Annunziata of Genoa, and these are not worth looking at after them! To-morrow we shall go to Herculaneum, ascend Vesuvius, and at night attend the Gala at St. Carlo; the following day we shall start for Pompeii, and the neighbourhood, and Pæstum. If we sleep at La Cava, I suppose we shall be able the next day to reach Pæstum, and go on easily the same night to Amalfi? No? Too much, you think? Ah! well, then, we can sleep at Salerno instead. You know our time is limited, and we want to see as much as we can, because when we return here, we shall wish to profit by the admissions to the Royal Palaces which you have so kindly procured for

us. Afterwards we shall be able to enjoy some of the balls and gaiety quietly, before we go on to Rome. We have engaged the *vetturino* for this day fortnight," &c., &c.

Reader, has not this traveller with the seven-league boots robbed you of your breath?

Our friends rarely came across any of these oppressed individuals, who were absent from the hotel from early dawn till nightfall; and there being no *table d'hôte* (which was less common at Naples even in those days than it has since become), they never had occasion to meet.

One party alone remained stationary, and appeared to be uninfluenced by any of the ordinary pursuits and occupations of travellers. It consisted of a widow and her daughter, quiet, ladylike-looking women, who rarely stirred beyond the garden walls except on Sundays and at the *Ave Maria*. This Helen remarked after she had ascertained that they were Roman Catholics, by seeing the daughter kneeling one evening in the Cathedral when she went there for the first time to examine its traces of antiquity.

This daughter was a tall, slightly-made young woman of about one or two and twenty, apparently in very delicate health, to judge by her excessive thinness and deadly pallor. Her features were regular, but devoid of expression, and when she rose at the close of the service, after a long private prayer, and passing near Helen, raised her downcast eyes for an instant, the latter remarked the same absence of all gentler feelings, in their large, cold depths, which earnest devotion might have been expected to bring forth. Her wan look excited compassion, her countenance repelled it, and Helen felt even pained by this brief glimpse of

a face which bore an aspect so unnatural in a young girl.

The mother's grief-worn appearance, on the contrary, told a different tale. She often walked solitarily beneath the shade of the orange trees, and Helen's eyes, prompted by her gentle, compassionate heart, would follow her slow, uncertain steps, and wonder why the daughter never joined, or gave her the assistance and support she apparently so greatly needed. Such weakness did not seem the consequence of age, but rather the effect of trouble, for

"By sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken."

Sometimes priests visited them in-doors, or occasionally joined the mother's walks in the garden, which interviews usually concluded with tears on her part.

These ladies excited much interest in Helen, who likewise drew the Contessa's attention to them.

"I dare say it is the old story," said Louisa, "some embryo nun who is being worked up to a proper pitch of enthusiasm by the black-coated gentry;" and her countenance clouded over, and she sighed deeply as she spoke.

Helen asked her maid if she knew their names, and learnt in reply that they were a Mrs. and Miss Harford; that the younger lady was quite a saint, and greatly venerated by all the people in the hotel for her devotion.

"They tell me, my lady, she was an 'eretic, but is now a Christian, and likely to be a saint. I believe they call us '*eretics*. '*Eretics*, indeed!" and Jones gave an indignant toss of her head as she left the room rather hastily, not feeling certain of her own self-command in her lady's presence, under such provocation.

"I was nearly right, you see, Helen, and I doubt

not that some vile plot is being hatched to ensnare this poor silly girl in their toils, especially if she have any money. Heaven defend us from monks and Roman Catholic priests!" she exclaimed vehemently; then seeing Helen's eyes suffused with tears, Louisa threw her arms caressingly round her, and as she kissed her cheek, whispered, "Forgive me, Helen dear, for touching on a subject which can only bring pain to us both; but 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,' and my life will be one long repentance. You at least are spared the bitterness of self-reproach!"

"Louisa, you forget; am I not answerable for my child?"

Her friend strained her in a closer embrace, which told that they shared the same trial, the same heart-ache.

A few evenings after the above scene a message was brought from Mrs. Harford, inquiring if any of the party could give her some laudanum. She would esteem it a great favour, as her daughter was suffering from severe face-ache.

As Mrs. Mowbray always kept some of this invaluable medicine under lock and key in case of need, it was quickly dispatched, with united offers of assistance from the three ladies, if they or their servants could be of any use. On inquiry the next morning, they learnt that Miss Harford was still suffering a good deal, but the laudanum was returned with the mother's compliments and thanks. That evening Helen and the Contessa, on returning from their usual donkey ride, were surprised to meet the supposed invalid ascending the staircase. Louisa stopped, and expressed a hope that she had quite recovered from her indisposition.

"Thank you, I am better," was the rather cold reply.

"I hope the laudanum was of some service," said

Helen; "it has often relieved me during face-ache when applied externally on cotton wool."

"Probably; but I did not try it. It was asked for by my mother."

"I am sorry," began Helen again, though a good deal chilled. "You might perhaps have been sooner relieved——" Here she was interrupted.

"When we are punished for our sins by pain, however severe, it should be borne uncomplainingly—it is only shirked by craven spirits!" Miss Harford spoke in clear, decided tones, and though looking, if possible, more ill than usual, she was evidently resolved not to be numbered among the "craven spirits" she denounced so sententiously.

Helen gazed at her silently, feeling little inclination to pursue the conversation, but Louisa seemed bent on arguing the question.

"Do you mean that one should not try to obtain relief through any remedies? Yet it is written, 'The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth; and he that is wise will not abhor them.'"

"Say, rather, that it is a privilege to be allowed to suffer to any amount here on earth! 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means'—'I myself should be a castaway.'" And with a very slight inclination she entered her apartments.

"Ma foi!" exclaimed the Contessa, "sympathy is thrown away upon that damsel. She may hope some day to rival the Spartan youth our schoolbooks tell us of, who allowed a fox to gnaw his body rather than by uttering a complaint discover what he carried concealed about him!"

Helen smiled. "'Tis a pity her religious zeal does not allow of a little more amiability!"

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER this they did not again address Miss Harford; in fact, she evidently avoided them, or if they met occasionally she passed on in haste, often without returning their salutation, at other times with the most distant bow. All Helen's sympathy for her had vanished, but the mother still excited a feeling of interest, there was so much more womanly softness about her. They did not meet for some days after the daughter's indisposition; but at length Helen, as she was walking alone with her baby in the garden, saw her there. Mrs. Harford hesitated for a moment, as if wishing to speak; then, with a slight apology for stopping her, begged to thank the Princess for her recent kind messages and offers of assistance.

"I regret that we could not be of more service," Helen answered kindly; "your daughter said she did not use the laudanum I sent her."

"No," said Mrs. Harford with a suppressed sigh, "I could not persuade her to try any of the remedies I suggested. Hers is a peculiar character, and the vocation to which she is destined enjoins penance and mortification to a painful degree."

"Do you allude to a conventual life?"

"Yes; my daughter will shortly take the veil at the Church of Santa —— at Naples, on entering one of the strictest orders."

"It must be a sore trial to a mother's heart!" said Helen, compassionating the sorrow she saw depicted in Mrs. Harford's countenance.

The mother's eyes filled with tears, but with a great effort, she checked her emotion.

"It is hopeless to combat my daughter's resolution, she has for years determined on taking this step, and I have no power to prevent it. She is doubtless right, and it is perhaps wicked in me to complain; however, I shall not be entirely separated from her, as I intend to enter the same convent, though only as a lay sister."

"Indeed! But will your strength be sufficient for such a life?"

"My strength or health is of little consequence now."

"May they not be of consequence to others? We do not live for ourselves alone in this world."

"True, Madame la Princesse, but I have no one to live for but this daughter, who will shortly be no longer mine. She does not wish me to accompany her, but it would break my heart to be separated from my child entirely." Tears hitherto restrained now coursed freely down those careworn cheeks, and Helen, grieved to the heart at sight of a sorrow which she was powerless to comfort, could only show her sympathy by kind words and kinder looks.

Her companion was apparently thankful to be able to pour her tale into pitying female ears, and this first conversation in the garden of the hotel, brought about many others.

Helen perceived that Mrs. Harford idolised her daughter with all the blind affection of a weak and rather superstitious nature, but she doubted much

whether the object returned any portion of her love. Her solitary interview with Miss Harford had left no very pleasing impression of the qualities of her heart; for though comparatively few amongst us are guilty of great and startling crimes, yet character and disposition are often clearly portrayed by trifling words and expressions, to which the speaker perhaps attaches no import.

By degrees Mrs. Harford related most of her daughter's history to her sympathising listener, and though Helen abstained from commenting thereon, she could plainly trace how the careless mother's own hand had sown the seed which in after years was to produce such bitter fruits of woe in her bosom!

Mr. and Mrs. Harford were people of good fortune, who passed most of the years of their early married life on the Continent. Each was fond of society, and not being nice as to its quality, they found that their tastes were easier gratified abroad than amid the comparative dullness of a country life at home.

Mrs. Harford was esteemed a beauty, whose lively manners and fashionable attire, added to her husband's money, rendered both welcome additions to the gay ranks of pleasure-seekers. Thus, like many other mothers belonging to "Vanity Fair," Mrs. Harford had but little time remaining to bestow on her only child—a girl. The latter received an occasional hurried kiss, when she was desired not to tumble her mamma's dress; or else, tricked out like a waxen doll, she accompanied the latter for a drive amid the gay world of Florence or Rome. The mother was really both fond and proud of her pretty child, but the only mode she knew of evincing it was to dress the little thing extravagantly and load her with toys and *bonbons*. She never sought to train her opening powers of intelligence, or to study the

disposition of her child ; such occupation exceeded the capacity of her weak mind, and the duty which should have belonged to the mother devolved on a servant. Little Florence had masters and daily governesses when of a proper age, but her childish affection centred entirely in an Italian maid who had brought her up from the cradle.

This woman was much attached to her little charge, and at first, to beguile the many hours they were together, or to soothe her childish tears, and subsequently for a weightier reason, Ninetta got into the habit of recounting marvellous histories of saints and miracles with which her bigoted mind was fully stored.

“ Oft great effects from trifling causes spring ! ”

The child greedily devoured these tales, and asked for more, and when in her mother’s society, she often betrayed such manifest impatience to return to her entertaining companion, that Mrs. Harford occasionally reproached her for not loving her. This would call forth a burst of tears and a warm embrace from Florence, and on the mother’s side a half fretful admonition to spare her toilette.

“ There, there ! be a good child and don’t cry ; and now run away to Ninetta.” And thus, with her affectionate impulses suddenly checked and repelled, little Florence would return to the nursery to be comforted by the Roman maid, and interested by fresh recitals of the wonders of her Church.

It was not in Ninetta’s nature to resist temptation like this, one too which appeared clad in a virtuous and laudable form. She was taught “ that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

This Word is addressed to all, though we are not told to practise it in an underhand, deceitful mode, nor enjoined to betray a trust reposed in us; but in the Romish Church "the end sanctifies the means,"—a doctrine which has worked a fearful amount of woe!

The Harfords were nominally Protestants, though they conveniently adjusted their creed to the rule of their every-day continental life, so that Mrs. Harford only attended church if not too fatigued from the Saturday's exertions, or obliged to rest herself against the Sunday night's *réunion*. She found Ninetta an excellent servant, and considered Florence quite safe in her constant keeping, and "as to instruction, and religion, and all that, the dear little pet has a first-rate Swiss governess, and plenty of masters, who teach her everything much better than I could do!"

The Swiss lady was only a daily instructress, so she did not interfere much with Ninetta's influence, and as Florence grew older, with all her natural enthusiasm and imagination, fostered by an ignorant and excitable Italian, the maid's power over her mind strengthened with her years. The two visited churches and ceremonies together; unknown, it is true, to Mrs. Harford, for Ninetta did not think it necessary to ask her permission, and Florence was not in the habit of speaking openly to her mother on any subject that interested herself. Once also Ninetta accompanied the child to see a nun take the veil; it was a relation of hers, and on this occasion she openly asked leave to be present at the ceremony and to take the Signorina with her. It was granted, and Florence sat as in a dream, watching the grand scene, the lights and flowers, the music and the long train of priests, and, beyond all, the bride herself, the subject of all this splendour! For though she was

Ninetta's relation, her family were prosperous members of the *mezzo-ceto*, who rather looked down on their poorer cousin.

Ninetta also rashly promised that Florence should go at some future time to visit the new nun, and as she was thenceforth allowed no peace till she fixed a day for carrying out her promise, she resolved to fulfil it, first, however, enjoining Florence to keep the matter secret from Madame, alleging some trivial cause which would not shock the child's conscience. The latter readily agreed to anything her dear Ninetta desired, and shortly after had her wish gratified by the sight of a real nun and the interior of a convent parlour. Cakes and sweetmeats were showered upon her, together with pretty fancy pin-cushions and other trifles, and a priest who happened to be present, and remarked the excitement the scene occasioned, asked "if she should not like to be a beautiful bride like the one she had seen, and have such a fine show in her honour—and such delicious cakes and *bonbons*?"

Florence clasped her hands in mute ecstasy at the thought, whereupon the priest kindly patted her head, signed her with the cross, and called her a "*poverina*." The nuns told her that when she grew to be a big girl, she might then come to them if she liked, and they would all be glad to have her.

Thus Florence's thoughts by day and dreams by night, were full of the beautiful sisters, and she bid Ninetta tell her again and again the histories of Santa Chiara, or Santa Rosa, or other holy ladies. At the age of twelve years, she had the bitter pain of parting from her favourite maid, who left the Harfords to be married. About the same period, the family moved northwards, and Florence was placed at a convent in Paris, to

perfect her French accent. As it was stipulated that her religion should not be interfered with, and as Mrs. Harford claimed her every Saturday till the Monday morning, the mother considered that she cared well for her child's education. But beyond taking her daughter occasionally to the British Chapel, when feeling herself equal to so great an exertion, Mrs. Harford made no other attempt to counteract the week's teaching at a school, where every endeavour was secretly and eagerly resorted to, in order to bias the already well-prepared mind of the pupil!

Oh ye careless mothers! shall no account be asked of you hereafter for the lives and souls of your children?

"Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech.

"Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women; for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come.

"Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones."

At the end of two years, when Florence was fourteen, — though in quickness and understanding she was much older, owing to the exotic system of the Continent, — Mr. Harford died rather suddenly. The widow felt the severity of a shock for which she was so little prepared, as she and her husband had lived happily together, being one in tastes and opinions on most matters. Florence was called home, but never having felt the sweets of family ties and affections, this prospect offered no charms to her mind, and she parted from the loving nuns and from her young schoolmates with many tears and clinging embraces, and promises to return often to visit them. This was prevented by Mrs. Harford's return to England, as soon as she could arrange to sell off her furniture in Paris.

Florence was likely to be an heiress, and her mother now seriously turned her thoughts — alas! when too late — to her daughter's future. Widowed and in rather delicate health, she grew fond of her late-found child, but the latter had been always too much separated from her mother to respond to this natural sentiment. They lived in the country, where Florence had a resident governess, an accomplished lady of irreproachable morals, but one who taught by rule and compass, and never thought it incumbent on her to suit her mode of instruction to her pupils' dispositions. Thus Florence's temperament, possessing as it did more of Italian fervour and excitability than English impassiveness, often received a sudden check not unlike the shock of a cold shower-bath; and feeling no great attachment to her mother, and something akin to dislike to her governess, she eagerly sought the companionship of a former schoolmate, who resided in the neighbourhood.

This young lady belonged to an English Roman Catholic family, and finished her education in Paris at the same convent of which Florence had been for two years an inmate. As Miss Gerald was her senior by a few years, they were not intimate at school, but in Protestant England the former eagerly, gladly welcomed any one who had shared a portion of her foreign conventual existence.

Thus the two girls became friends by a chain of accidental circumstances, and the seed which an illiterate servant had sown years before, and which the carelessness rather than the wilful neglect of the mother had fostered, was now to ripen and bring forth fruit!

Florence had never forgotten her first childish wish to be a nun; her two years' residence in a convent as

a pupil had shown her only the fair side of the picture, as all the inmates were unanimous in desiring that the little *heretic* should carry away with her a favourable impression of the peace and harmony reigning within those prison walls.

Miss Gerald, who was intended for a convent, was merely making the most of the brief holiday allowed her, before taking the irrevocable vows in an English retreat. After this event took place, Florence was still permitted to see her friend; and there being far greater facilities in our country than abroad for visiting nuns, Miss Gerald, now Sister Martha, made the most of her opportunities.

Fired with a zeal to emulate, however feebly, some of the saints of whom she had read and heard so much, Florence's mind was speedily made up, and she only waited for a suitable opportunity publicly to declare her sentiments. She wished much to change her religion immediately, — a resolution which her cautious guides advised her to defer putting openly into execution; *privately* she was carefully instructed in her new faith, and considered a member of the true Church, and, somewhat to her surprise, was even allowed to attend the ceremonies of Protestant worship! She was rather staggered at this latitude at first, but her scruples were easily smoothed away by these instructors of virtue and religion, who assured her that if she declared her opinions while a minor, she would be entirely removed from their influence, a watch set on her movements, and her freedom of thought and action stopped. When she came of age, the law would have no farther authority over her, and she might put her zealous and praiseworthy intentions into practice, by entering a convent and enriching the Church's already overflow-

ing coffers with her fortune. And thus for two or three years did this "brand plucked out of the fire," this lamb clothed in innocence and purity, pursue unblushingly and with deadened conscience, a deliberate system of deceit and hypocrisy towards the world, her friends, her mother, — *her God!*

As she approached the end of her term of probation, she strove to withdraw herself more and more from the gaieties of the society in which she moved. Her disposition and temper, always ill regulated and neglected from her earliest years, became still more capricious and unamiable, owing to the constant check she had to keep on her words and actions to avert suspicion. Her fortune and good looks had attracted many suitors to do her homage, and while she occasionally cheered them with her smiles and excited their hopes, at other times she would give them a sharp, almost scornful, repulse, that effectually damped their ardour and dismissed them from her train.

Towards Mrs. Harford she was equally uncertain in her behaviour; at first she experienced some natural feelings of compunction at the deceit she was practising on one whose affection towards her ripened as her own cooled; and she would evince her regret in sudden bursts of tenderness, that delighted the fond mother's heart. For Mrs. Harford, as her health failed and years crept on, grew daily more attached to her daughter; as she no longer belonged to the butterflies of the world, she exulted greatly in her child's success, in the notice her beauty attracted, in the court paid to the heiress.

"Il y a toujours l'un qui baise, et l'autre qui tend la joue."

Thus, as the mother grew fonder, the heart of the daughter hardened. What was earthly love to one

who was set apart to be the bride of Heaven? She must root out utterly, entirely, all strange affections, all ties which might prove a stumbling-block in her path. And so gradually — not all at once, for the effort cost even Florence a struggle — but surely, her heart closed up; thoughts, hopes, fears, and all those natural feelings which at times knock loudly for admittance, even at the coldest bosom, all were stilled, checked, deadened, as sinful evidences of mere worldliness. That religion, which in its love to God teaches and enjoins love to our fellow-creatures, was not Florence's creed; the prejudiced nuns and deceiving priests commended her strength of purpose and self-denial, and extolled her piety; she was calmly content, "nor dreamed that the little quiet muddy current of self-will, which ran without noise or indecorum under the whole structure of her being, might be found in a future day to have undermined all her hopes of heaven." *

Florence completed her one and twentieth year, and on that day took possession of her own, surrounded by the joyful, perhaps envious, congratulations of friends. Her mother gave a handsome entertainment, at which Miss Harford was the queen of the day. She was flushed, excited, her eyes sparkled, her whole countenance was lighted up with animation and seeming pleasure. All thought her handsomer than ever under such unwonted excitement, and prognosticated a brilliant worldly career to the favoured one of fortune. The next day was to be likewise a fête. The house was filled with guests, and many were expected to throng the beautiful gardens, where music and archery would entertain the careless crowd. Carriages were arriving fast, but Florence, the gay mistress of the revels, did

* Mrs. Stowe.

not appear. Mrs. Harford sent message after message to hasten her coming, but in vain, and at length, vexed and disappointed at such strange behaviour, she hurried herself to her daughter's room. Entering without knocking, she started at the sight of Florence kneeling with clasped hands before a crucifix; she was partly dressed in the *toilette* intended for the *fête champêtre*, but her bonnet and mantle were thrown carelessly aside, as if suddenly discarded after they had been put on.

The daughter rose and turned towards her mother, who, though dreading some evil news from the other's countenance, tried to ask quietly the reason of her delay.

Laying her hand on the crucifix, which Mrs. Harford gazed at inquiringly, Florence answered calmly:

"Because *this* bids me renounce the world, its vanities and temptations. I had intended to defer all explanation, at least until after this day, to spare you, mamma, but I cannot, I must not. You will forgive, I trust, the deceit I have been compelled to practise towards you, but it was incumbent upon me, since those whose right it is to instruct my ignorance and direct me in all things here below, enjoined secrecy for a time. Mother, I have been long a Roman Catholic and dedicated to the Church's service, and I have only waited for the law to give me the right to perform my vows."

She spoke in a passionless, steady voice, utterly at variance with the torrent of anger, supplication, and grief which by turns poured from her mother's lips. She became rather paler than before, but was otherwise unmoved; and when Mrs. Harford, silenced by pure exhaustion, strove to soften her daughter's stern resolve

by tears and embraces, she said, 'perhaps somewhat more gently—

"Mamma, this resolution has not been taken suddenly; it has grown with my years, and strengthened with my growth, and now my matured will has confirmed it. It cannot change, therefore do not, for both our sakes, strive to turn me from my duty. You may not speak, nor I listen, to such words. Let this be our last difference on the subject."

She then quietly, but determinedly, unclasped her now almost fainting mother's arms from round her neck, imprinted a passionless kiss upon her cold brow, and delivered her into the care of the maid she summoned.

Locking her door, Florence again prostrated herself for a long while before the crucifix, heedless of the revel and the music which continued unchecked in the park below. The guests wondered, at first, that neither of their hostesses appeared to bid them welcome, but gradually a whisper of the truth,—first started as a profound secret by the lady's-maid,—ran through the crowd, who, after they had eaten and drunk, marvelled at the news, and added to the wondrous tale, reluctantly departed.

After this, Florence sought a retreat for a brief space in the convent inhabited by Miss Gerald, but she had no intention of making her vows in England. Rome was the attraction, and gradually as the mother's useless opposition gave way, she brought her to consent so far as to accompany her abroad. Imperceptibly she there worked on Mrs. Harford's feeble mind, and made her almost regard her daughter as a saint, as one singled out by Heaven to work great things; till in time both these "silly women," as their enthusiasm warmed, saw a miraculous interposition in the conversion of the

younger, dating even from her early childhood. This sentiment was encouraged by their spiritual advisers, and under its influence, and the wish to be still near Florence, Mrs. Harford was induced to enter the Church's fold, and swell the list of illustrious perverts.

At Rome, while preparations were being made for Miss Harford's taking the veil, she suddenly became alarmingly ill from malaria fever. When her life was almost despaired of she confirmed her intentions of profession by a vow, and wished even to be conveyed in her then desperate state to a convent. But the physicians declared such a proceeding would only hasten her end, whereas with care and watchfulness her life might be spared. Thus it proved, and Florence rallied, though with a constitution shattered by that most obstinate and subtle of maladies. She in consequence obtained permission to proceed to Naples, and enter a convent in that city, but the fatigue of the journey again prostrated her strength, and brought her to the brink of the grave.

As she slowly recovered, she was removed to Sorrento to avoid the injurious effects of the summer heats, and thus it came to pass that the Harfords and Castalbancos became accidentally inmates of the same hotel, and acquainted with one another.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOUISA'S brief holiday drew to a close, and with great regret she prepared to quit her kind friends, and return to the heated city.

"I should have liked to stay a little longer for Pepito's sake," she said to Helen, the evening before her departure; "I cannot understand the child, he looks healthy and well, and yet—your baby is different, Helen dear?" and she looked anxiously from one child to the other, as they were seated on the terrace floor. One, however, crowing, laughing, and trying with all its baby might to make a noise, and defy its mother's control, the other alternately watching its little companion's gambols, with large bright eyes,—Louisa's eyes,—or remaining perfectly quiescent, and unmoved by all around.

"Indeed, Louisa, you make troubles for yourself; what child can look healthier than your fine boy? My little mite is a quarter his size, though she makes up for it in amount of spirits,—eh, little puss?" she continued, laughing merrily, as the pretty creature made abortive attempts to crawl on all fours in pursuit of some leaves, which a little breeze was blowing about.

"But why does not Pepito play like that?" asked Louisa. "That is what puzzles me."

"Because young gentlemen are more dignified than little girls; is it not so, Signor Pepito? See what pretty

flowers these are ; would baby like to have them ? ” and she held some roses aloft as she spoke, but the boy’s eyes were watching little Maria. His mother called him.

“ Pepito ! ” but he did not turn towards her on hearing that sweetest of sounds to a child — a mother’s voice.

“ Pepito ! Pepito ! ” she continued, “ look at mamma. Oh Helen ! the child does not care for me ! ” she exclaimed bitterly as the boy remained quite unmoved, heedless of her call.

Helen seized the child in her arms, and turned him towards his mother, who stood gazing with tearful, sorrowing eyes ; but at the sight of her the baby’s countenance brightened, and he held out his little arms to be taken. Louisa caught him to her bosom, and smothered him with sobbing kisses.

Her friend turned away to conceal her own emotion, but she could not overcome a sensation of anxiety and dread on her friend’s account, which this little scene had awakened in her mind.

On the following day the Contessa returned to Naples.

The summer was now fast changing into autumn, and the Mowbrays and their daughter resolved on quitting Sorrento, and proceeding to Amalfi, wishing to complete the tour of the neighbourhood ere returning to town. Alas for poor Helen ! she dreaded the return to Naples most pitiably, for shortly afterwards her parents would leave her, in order to start for England. Mrs. Mowbray’s delicate frame was unsuited to a southern climate, it was too weakening ; and the summer heat, however mitigated by country air, had tried her health and strength sorely, so that Helen made no effort to detain those dear ones, whose departure threatened almost to break her heart. When first parting from them a year and a half before, she had felt less moved, less grieved ;

now she tried not to own to herself that the future looked blank and dreary.

She took a friendly leave of Mrs. Harford, who promised to visit the Princess if the latter returned to Naples ere the daughter made her profession, as Mrs. Harford would be unable to do so afterwards. Though entering the convent merely as a lay sister, and consequently able to quit it when she pleased, she would not be free to go in and out at will, and she therefore begged the Princess, whose sympathy had won her heart, to come and see her sometimes at Santa ——

The conventual rule was so strict that even this slight grace would require express permission from the Pope, but Helen determined to apply for it through Gaetano's relation, the Cardinal. She pitied the poor lady's desolate lot in a foreign land; she saw that she was only pursuing a shadow when sacrificing herself to a daughter who had no affection to bestow in return, and she therefore assured her new friend that she would not lose sight of her entirely. At times, however, she grew impatient when the mother dilated on her daughter's sanctity and abnegation of self; she even recounted marvellous instances of her early spiritual call, with anecdotes of her experience which were little short of the miraculous. Helen hardly knew which to wonder at most, the heartlessness of the daughter, or the credulity of the mother!

"Alas!" she thought, "if this weak woman had in earlier days proved her love for her child by careful religious training, she would not be reaping such bitter fruits from her own carelessness! Now that it is too late, her heart is craving after affection and it is denied her. God grant that such may never be my lot!" and she clasped her baby to her bosom.

Our friends were much pleased with the beauty of Amalfi scenery: the village itself was mean and dirty, and not all Helen's romance availed to view it in any other light than as a miserable Neapolitan *paese*. But the verdure and wildness of the Valley of the Mills charmed her, together with the glorious view she obtained from Ravello, commanding as it did a small bay surrounded by rich cultivation and numerous villages, with the magnificent Gulf of Salerno stretching far beyond,

"Looking tranquillity."

How an enthusiastic mind like hers appreciated such lovely and romantic scenes! and how it mourned over the utter decadency of Scala, Ravello, Amalfi, fallen below the civilisation of the poorest English villages, after making for themselves a name and a place in history!

"The knights are dust,
And their good swords are rust;
Their souls are with the saints, we trust."

After exhausting the treasures of this exquisite neighbourhood, the party continued their progress to La Cava, intending there to pause awhile ere making a final move to Naples. The beautiful Costiera was not then open to carriages, and much as our friends longed to traverse that magnificent road and examine more nearly such a great undertaking, yet fearing the fatigue of a five hours' expedition on donkeys, a boat was hired in which they embarked for Vietri early one bright autumn morning.

The blue waters of the sea sparkled and danced in the glittering sunbeams, while scarce a ripple moved on the calm surface. The regular sound of the oars was

pleasant as they kept time with the boatmen's chants, and thus dreamily they glided on their way—past tiny villages whose snow-white cottages were surrounded by sweet-scented orange groves and graceful vineyards; past bare, precipitous rocks, whose fantastic shapes at times amused the eye, while at others their frowning heights conveyed a feeling of oppression as if they were like to fall and overwhelm frail man beneath their weight. Past olive plantations that clothed the heights in a mournful garb of sad-coloured green, well suited to their awful grandeur; while far away on the mountain peaks some ruined abbeys, ivy-clad, stood out against the clear sky pointing to Heaven.

“ Here hoary Time
Sits on his throne of ruins, while the wind
Sweeps o'er his various lyre;—how musical,
How sweet the diapason. Melancholy
Spreads o'er the soul her mood—that kindly mood
Which calms the thought, and lifts it to the skies.”

They landed at Vietri, and drove on to Cava, where they found apartments in a house on the mountain side, not far from the town. None of the party wished for society, but Helen's Neapolitan connections entailed several visitors desirous to show hospitality and attention to Madame la Princesse, and all were charmed with her simple elegance and extreme beauty. But our heroine was too pure-minded to relish the open admiration she received from those excitable Italians, to whom northern loveliness presents more attractions (from its contrast) than the sallowskins of their own countrywomen. Unsupported by her husband's presence Helen shunned such public homage, and greatly preferred the rides over the mountains and excursions in the neighbourhood which Mr. Mowbray proposed. Mrs. Mowbray was not

always able to join these expeditions, and the father and daughter started alone, daily clinging to each other all the more tenderly as the time appointed for their separation drew near. One day, however, the Marchese d'A—— prevailed on them to witness, from his country villa, the Cava sport of ensnaring pigeons, and as this was an amusement peculiar to the neighbourhood they were curious to behold it.

The Marchese's Casino was situated at Rotolo, a village attainable only by a very steep path. This road is usually a favourite point with artists, as it commands a full view of the western side of the valley of La Cava; Monte Finestra and St. Martino seem close at hand, and to the north the mountains open and disclose the houses of Nocera, gleaming white in the far distance. It is a toilsome ascent both for man and beast; but the little roadside chapels afford halting-places to pedestrians, till they reach the level lane traversing Rotolo, and conducting to Casapura, Dupino, and other villages.

The Princess and the Mowbrays on arriving at their destination found a large and gay party assembled to enjoy the annual sport. The Marchese welcomed the strangers with true native amiability, and they soon found themselves at home amid the friendly, good-natured inhabitants of Cava. Coldness and formality do not exist among the natural and truly courteous Neapolitans, whose kindliness of manner towards strangers shows to great advantage when compared with the stiffness of our more frigid country people.

Refreshments in the shape of ices and sweet cakes were handed round, while a band of wind instruments made the hills re-echo with sweet strains. Afterwards the company proceeded to a terrace overlooking the

valley, and commanding a full view of the scene of action. The principal spots selected for this sport are the plains of La Valle and Rotolo, but all around the mountain sides are covered with tall, slender towers, that excite the wonder of travellers, who are ever prone to connect them with remains of antiquity.

In these turrets practised slingers are stationed, who are to ensnare the wild pigeons by their art. When the cloud of birds enters the valley, headed usually by a leader, attempts are made from various points to attract their notice, but the turret nearest their progress is commonly successful. As the flight sweeps through the ravines, the slingers dexterously cast a white stone in advance of them and near the nets; the stupid birds hesitate, wheel about in the air, uncertain whether to proceed, and finally descend to earth after their supposed companion, when the nets are loosened, and they are quickly enthralled.

The natives enjoyed the scene immensely, but Helen's tender heart beat compassionately for the poor captured pigeons, and she would gladly have lifted the nets and restored the unhappy prisoners to their dearly loved freedom. Still it was no worse than shooting partridges and pheasants in our own land, only that ladies are not usually present at such sport. Her feelings of pity were only laughed at by her unimagined companions, who, amid music, conversation, and frivolity, utterly ignored the existence of their victims, except as promoters of their amusement.

On the whole the sight was striking enough to a foreigner. The pretty birds wheeling aloft in graceful circles; the slender turrets looking picturesque on the green hill side; the shouts and cries of the slingers exulting in the success of their aim, and awakening

the "glad echoes" with their rough southern voices; the gaily-attired spectators surveying the scene with irresistible excitement, while the soft strains of the band floated on the fragrant herb-scented air, charming the ear with their melody. The myrtle-covered mountains rose on every side still and solemn, as though silently rebuking such frivolous pastime beneath their shadows; and the blue canopy of heaven spread over all, checquered by some light feathery clouds irradiated with the last glorious tints of the already departed sun.

The evening before their return to Naples Helen and her father wandered alone in the small *masseria* attached to their house. Very pleasant had been their short stay at beautiful Cava, very happy those few peaceful hours that formed a lull between the melancholy past and the dim, hidden future. To Helen the coming separation was inexpressibly painful. Her parents were old, and she scarce dared hope to see them again unless they came to visit her; Castalbiano disliked England and his wife's country people so intensely, that she knew he would never accompany her thither, and would he suffer her to go alone? Helen's love was still faithful to her worthless husband, though she could no longer look up to him with respect. She felt instinctively that her father's presence was a protection, and alas! in her own person, as well as in other instances, she had already discovered that a Neapolitan regards his wife as a mere animal, and treats her with as little consideration. She tried to conceal these feelings from her parents, though occasionally giving vent to some natural grief when their journey was talked of. But although Mr. Mowbray spoke hopefully of future meetings, and strove to cheer his daughter's drooping spirits, his own heart bled for

one so young, so friendless, in a foreign home. He had seen enough now of Castelbianco to doubt his promises of permanent amendment; but had he known to what extent his darling Helen had been ill used, could he ever have torn himself away?

And thus,

“With musing weak, heartsick with thought,”

they wandered silently beneath the fruit trees. The *masseria* overlooked the valley of Bunea, and a low wall at its extremity afforded at once a seat and a protection from the precipice, which thence descended, vine clad, to the edge of the babbling brook. Mr. Mowbray seated himself on this parapet, while his daughter reclined on the grass beside him; her mother, wearied with much sight-seeing, had retired in-doors to rest.

“‘England, thy beauties are tame and domestic
To one who has roam’d on the mountains afar;’”

said Mr. Mowbray after a lengthened silence.

“You will be shocked at my want of taste, Helen, when I tell you that in spite of the scenery which now surrounds me, I shall be glad to greet the old place again.”

“Do you think, then, Papa, that the Priory has no charms for me?” said Helen, with sorrowful earnestness. “Indeed I also should dearly like to see it again.”

“And so you will, darling, God willing! This time next year I hope we shall all be there together. I want you to spend next summer in England, as I am sure your health will require the change; and I intend to make great improvements against your coming.”

Helen's eyes filled with tears.

"I will do my best to persuade Gaetano to undertake the journey," she said at length, "but England has not the same attractions for him that it has for me."

"True; but he will doubtless make such a slight sacrifice in our favour. I must speak to him about it."

A silence ensued which lasted some little time, Mr. Mowbray broke it.

"Helen dearest," he said at length, somewhat abruptly, "I shall leave Naples with a lighter heart if you will promise to summon me to your side, if you ever need your old father's advice or support?"

"Dear, dear Papa, I will indeed; but why should you fear?"

"Nay, I do not *fear* anything, but you know that we are a long way off from each other, and I should not have been here now if the Contessa di Malafede had not written to me. It was not your fault, poor child, you were not in a state to send for any one; but in future, my darling, if you be in any trouble remember me. I am old and good for nothing, but I am very fond of my little Helen, and shall feel easier in my mind if I think she will always confide in me."

Helen kissed the kind hand that held hers, her tears flowed too fast to allow of her giving utterance to words.

"Your mother's health may not allow of her undertaking a long journey again soon, but I am as fresh as a rose, and shall enjoy nothing better than another trip to *bella Napoli*. Therefore, cheer up, little woman, I do not think we shall part for ever this time."

Helen was weak, or tired, or perhaps foolish; but she

nestled close in her father's arms to weep silently, though not hopelessly.

"Of all the knots which Nature ties,
The secret, sacred sympathies,
That, as with viewless chains of gold,
The heart a happy prisoner hold ;
None is more chaste, more bright, more pure,
Stronger stern trials to endure ;
None is more pure of earthy leaven,
More like the love of highest Heaven,
Than that which binds, in bonds how blest,
A daughter to a father's breast."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Castelbiancos had established themselves for the winter in their town residence, and the Mowbrays had quitted their sorrowing daughter. Helen experienced an improvement in her domestic comfort since the removal of the old Princess. She could act more freely and carry out most of her wishes in the household arrangements, for she was now mistress ; that is to say, as much so as a Neapolitan lady is ever allowed to be by her lord and master, who pokes his nose into the nursery, the kitchen, and the housekeeping, with excessive zeal.

"I am the man — I am the head,
All follow my behest;
I, woman, am the neck — 'tis said,
The neck the head can twist."

Doubtless these *heads* will be very much affronted at being told that when they do interfere in such matters, they generally go *contrary*, but so it is everywhere. He who keeps all the bills, looks over the cook's accounts "to spare his dear little wife the trouble," (as if she were not in a fever of fidgets the while, longing to snatch the books out of his hands!) and checks the items, is sure, with all his wisdom, to hit upon the wrong things after all. He skips over the dozen eggs in the rice pudding, when the said eggs cost twopence a-

piece, because he is fond of the dish, and recollects that it looked nice and yellow at table; neither does he remark the many pounds of butter whereof cook declares she used every mite, "because you know, Sir, you don't like lard in the cooking." But the saints defend us from the commotion and indignation excited when he sees the expense of the *purée à la reine*, which he had ordered as a pleasant variety to constant mutton broth and ox-tail soup. "Who ever heard of using chickens to make soup of? What wicked extravagance, preposterous! Why, they are selling at seven shillings a couple, and such tiny things as they are too!"

"You know, my dear," interposes the wife gently and submissively, "I said it would be better to wait till poultry got cheaper. I can do very well without such soups, dear, I assure you; pray don't get them for *me*. (!)"

Indeed, good gentlemen, you had better let your "dear little wife," however delicate, manage the house-keeping, and check cook's bills; you will be sweeter tempered for the self-denial, you may rest assured.

Helen, however, made a resolute stand against Castalbiano's nursery system, for what could he know about babies? Country air had done wonders for little Maria, who grew healthy and strong, but when the mother proposed to wean her before the winter set in, she was met by a perfect hurricane of remonstrance on the part of the wet-nurse, the Neapolitan doctor, her husband, her native visitors, and even from Don Dominico, who deemed it a case of conscience to protect the little Christian from the outlandish practices of her heretic mother! Who ever heard of a child being weaned before it was eighteen or twenty months old? Little Mariette was only ten! Helen and her faithful Jones

in vain endeavoured to stem the tide of disapprobation, and were on the eve of yielding the point when the wet-nurse herself unexpectedly joined the enemy's ranks. She came with a pitiful tale to her mistress, that her husband had come to Naples from his distant *paese*; that he would not part with her any longer, and that one of her own children was sick, and she must return home. Castelbianco stormed, threatened, and refused point blank; whereupon the nurse tried the effect of tears, passed her days in weeping and wailing, and rendered her little charge restless and sickly in consequence. Gaetano perceiving this, became as anxious to be rid of the woman as Helen herself could be, who, at length, obtained her wish, and was so fortunate as to procure a nice young English nurse in her stead.

It was well for our heroine that her child engrossed so large a portion of her time and thoughts, because her husband gave her but little of his company. During the Mowbrays' short stay in town ere their final departure, the Prince was assiduous in his attentions to them and to his wife, but freed from their espionage, he did not care to keep up appearances, and his horses, billiards, and dissolute companions thenceforward engaged all his time.

The Prince was not actually unkind to Helen; this ordeal would have been trying enough to so gentle a being, yet she would almost rather have preferred such notice of her existence to the utter *nonchalance* with which he ignored her presence. She strove to find excuses for him, tried to *Neapolitanize* her sentiments in order to win his approbation, even interested herself in his racing pursuits (she had long found the uselessness of remonstrance), but to no purpose. She saw her slender hold on his affections daily slackening more and

more, and the delicate flower drooped under the bitter pain this knowledge cost her. Poor Helen never imagined that even in the character of a devoted lover, Castelbianco's passion had been fictitious! How could such a miserable, debased specimen of humanity desire the affection of a young, innocent creature like Helen? What sympathy had they in common? Country, religion, habits, opinions, all opposite as the two poles—how could two such discordant spirits ever become heartily one? The Neapolitan needed a rich wife to retrieve his half-ruined fortunes, and money being more plentiful in England than in Naples, he sought one among her heretic daughters. Instead of turning Roman Catholic like the majority of her less squeamish countrywomen, Helen proved obstinate, and occasioned him trouble and worry, besides robbing him of an expected rich inheritance. He wanted a son to continue his name and family, and she gave him instead a puny, useless girl! Truly a wife under such circumstances became an encumbrance, and he had every right to console himself elsewhere; he acted accordingly.

Such were the husband's sentiments; may poor Helen remain ignorant of their bitterness!

Don Dominico, on the death of his patroness, experienced a great change in his comfort at the Palazzo Castelbianco: so great, that he gradually relaxed in his visits. The Prince, now that he was no longer obliged to consult his mother's wishes, soon evinced his dislike to priests and confessors, and though Don Dominico occasionally assumed his long-accustomed place at the dinner table, he quickly discovered that his dictums were not regarded with the same awe to which he had been used during the lifetime of the old Princess. Helen was naturally polite and courteous, Gaetano was so

diplomatically; but the priest felt that the day of his sovereignty was over, and as his invitations to the house were not given with much heartiness, Don Dominico troubled them but seldom, though he failed not to give utterance in private to all his chagrin and disgust.

As to Padre Calvi, his visits likewise became few and far between. Helen, finding that her early confidence in his conscientiousness had been misplaced, shunned him accordingly. Nevertheless he had only acted up to his religious opinions, and now would fain have taken a more energetic part in the *ménage*, but he found the young Princess proof against his advice, while her husband was the boon companion of gamblers and blacklegs. His influence was gone, and about the period of Castelbianco's return to town, Padre Calvi was despatched by the chief of his order on a private mission to Rome.

Thus the house was freed from both its blackcoated visitors.

One evening the Castelbiancos were lingering over their dessert, not, however, in any sociable spirit, for the Prince was moody and cross, and Helen, after vain attempts to promote conversation, could only relapse into silence, and furtively watch his knitted brows. In early days his wife used to scrutinize his countenance, and anxiously and affectionately question the cause of any apparent uneasiness she there discerned; but now she no longer ventured on such critical ground: a few rough answers, and sharp requests "that she would hold her tongue and leave him in peace," had taught her wisdom for the future.

So the present meal had not proved a very cheerful one, but Gaetano sat on because he was lost in thought

—Helen because she hoped still for some chance word of kindness to reward her patience.

Suddenly the door of the room was opened noisily, and the Contessa di Malafede hurried in unannounced, her looks greatly excited.

“Oh, he is taken!” she cried, in a frightened tone.

“Taken,” exclaimed Helen and her husband together; “Who? what do you mean?” they continued, almost thinking their friend alluded to some fit with which somebody had been seized.

“The Count—Luigi, they have taken him off. What shall I do?—how ought I to act? I have rushed here for advice!”

Helen, though much alarmed, said nothing, but pouring out a glass of wine she made the Contessa drink it, and then taking her hand, she entreated her to calm her agitation and explain her words to them more clearly.

Gaetano looked uneasy and terrified, and hastened to bolt all the doors, first examining whether there were any listeners outside. He then returned to the Contessa.

“Do you mean,” he asked nervously, “that the *sbirri* have seized the Count?”

“Yes, yes; what is to be done?”

“Dear Louisa,” said Helen with a somewhat relieved smile, “there cannot be any cause for anxiety on your part; it is some mistake which a few hours, nay, less time even, will clear up. Do not be alarmed!”

“Pazzie!” interrupted her husband sharply, “you are talking nonsense, Elena, as if people were ever taken up *by mistake* by those *maladetti cagnacci*!”

His wife stared at him in surprise, the Contessa with terror.

“How did it happen?” he continued.

"We were going out to dine with Madame ——. I had entered the carriage; my husband was following, and had one foot on the step, when a common-looking fellow in plain clothes pushed aside the servant, and said something in an insolent tone to his master. I bent forward to see what it was that made Luigi start, and then perceived there were two men. They were strong, big fellows, carrying thick sticks, and though well dressed, one could see they were unaccustomed to good clothes. The one who had first spoken told Luigi he must return with them up stairs. I was angry that my husband took his impertinence so coolly, and desired the man to stand aside, as we could not delay then; if he had any business to talk about he had better return to-morrow at a proper hour. The fellow laughed, and uttered some vile joke, which seemed to amuse his companion immensely. Whereupon my husband, who had turned very pale, desired me not to speak or to interfere. At that instant a third man, whom I had not before remarked, stepped forward, and his cocked hat made the truth apparent to me. He laid his hand authoritatively on the Count's arm, and desired him to lead the way up stairs, as they were ordered to make a domiciliary visit. I jumped out of the carriage and began questioning Luigi in French as to the meaning of all this, but he entreated me, for the love of Heaven, to be silent and cautious, as every word would be noted down and used against him."

Louisa stopped; she felt sick and faint, and was unable for a while to continue her account. Helen clasped her hand tenderly in hers, anxious to evince her sincere sympathy; but Castalbiano was only intent on examining the doors. When he returned to the

ladies, he begged them to speak lower, as they did not know who might be listening.

"At first," resumed Louisa, "I had imagined these were bailiffs, though almost persuaded that we had no debts. (Gaetano muttered "*beati loro!*") But I soon discovered my mistake. Luigi gave up all his keys, mine were likewise required, and we had to sit silent spectators of the work of devastation that ensued. One of the plain-coated wretches kept watch over us, and had the insolence, when alone with us, to ask the Count for a *bottiglia e due zigarri*. I could hardly contain my indignation as Luigi gave him both. High and low," she burst forth impatiently, "these people are all alike, there's no spirit in the country!"

"Hush, Louisa dear, don't say so!" cried Helen gently, while her husband only gave a little laugh.

"After turning every thing in the house upside down, they pounced on some books,—my English bible and a copy of Dumas' '*Corricolo*' amongst others. These were the most *seditionous*, for the Count never would keep many works at home, and Neapolitans must not subscribe to the British Library; those we get from the foreign one in Strada Santa Brigida have all passed through the censorship of the priests. An enlightened country, truly! I then hoped they would leave, but to my terror they bid Luigi prepare to accompany them to the *Prefettura*. I remonstrated loudly against this injustice, and asked the official in uniform the reason for such gross ill-usage, but he only shrugged his shoulders, and said, '*Vi direi bugra*,' an idiom that always exasperates me! My husband said nothing to him, but advised me to be quiet and submit to inevitable necessity, while the police sergeant, in a low tone, that his companions might not hear, whis-

pered, '*Signora Contessa, lasciamo andare questo discorso. Vale assai più il silenzio che tante ciarle.*' And so they have taken him to the police office, and I got another carriage and drove here as fast as the horses could go, hoping the Prince might be able to help us or point out what ought to be done?"

"Oh Gaetano!" cried his wife, "do go directly to the *Prefettura*, and see how you can assist the Count. There must be some error which you will be able to clear up."

"And so you would wish me to enliven his solitude by keeping him company? *Mille grazie!*" he exclaimed mockingly.

"But, dear Gaetano," continued poor Helen piteously, "surely you would wish to help a friend in need, and there can be no accusation against the Count."

"How do we know any such thing?" was the sharp retort, which brought hot tears into his wife's eyes. The Contessa sat gloomily gazing at the fire, deep in thought."

"Helen!" she said at length, "I feel sure that miscreant, Torlone, has a finger in this business."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because while I was waiting in the *portone* for the servant to fetch a fly (the Count had taken our own carriage), the Baron came suddenly into the broad glare of the gas lamps and stared me insolently, almost jeeringly, in the face. I turned away indignant at his impertinence, but at the instant the carriage arrived, and I forgot the incident. A similar piece of treachery would be worthy such a man, and he may have been watching to see the success of his scheme."

It was a likely story indeed, and Helen felt it to be so; the Prince shrugged his shoulders and whistled.

His wife, grieved by his manner, renewed her entreaties that he would do something, but he quickly silenced her.

"Via, Elena, non mi seccare! If one bird is taken, there is no reason why another should fly into the trap. I can't do the Count any good, he must know very well that none of his friends can, and I love my liberty too much to risk it for any one;" and so saying, he quitted the room. "'Put not your trust in *Princes!*'" said Louisa curtly.

Her friend's tears were now flowing rapidly, and she strove vainly to restrain them, as she stood by the fireplace, turning her back on the Contessa, in her desire to conceal the evidences of her emotion.

"Well," said Louisa coldly, rising as she spoke, "moments are precious, and I must seek advice where it is more likely to be given in a kindly spirit." Then noting Helen's tears, she continued, "Don't cry, child, it is not your fault that your husband is such a cautious individual."

"Dear Louisa, I wish I knew how to help you; I will accompany you anywhere you wish. Gaetano has been vexed at something, I think, to-day; I am sure he will give you his assistance to-morrow."

"Thank you, but I will not trouble him nor risk his safety. I shall go now to Mr. Marchmont, and ask his advice. Thank Heaven I am still English, and have a claim on my own Legation."

"I will go with you," cried Helen.

"No, no, Helen dear, don't anger your husband, and I see that it would take but little to accomplish that to-night. We can meet early to-morrow," and resisting all her friend's entreaties to be allowed to accompany her, the Contessa departed. Soon after Castelbianco looked into the room.

"I thought she would never leave the house! How long do you intend to keep the carriage waiting to take you to the opera?"

"Oh! I can't go to San Carlo to-night."

"But indeed you must. Will you have all the world know that the Conte di Malafede's imprisonment for political causes has destroyed your power of enjoying an opera?"

"But, Gaetano, how can I be so heartless as to appear happy and pleased when my friend is in such distress? Everybody knows that I am intimate with Louisa."

"And it is just because *everybody knows it* that I desire you to show yourself to-night at San Carlo. The less intimacy you keep up with the Contessa in future the better."

Helen's entreaties availed not to move her husband's harsh determination; he forced her to appear for a time at the theatre, desiring her besides to conceal all traces of agitation as much as possible, if she valued his safety and welfare.

Helen, poor slave that she was, complied; and with her face wreathed in smiles, and an aching heart, she received her friends as usual in her box at San Carlo.

CHAPTER XV.

ON the following morning, the Princess proceeded betimes to the residence of her friend, whom she found on the point of starting to see her husband; Helen insisted on accompanying her.

"Mr. Marchmont has kindly offered to go with me," said Louisa; "he will perhaps be able to obtain admission for me to the Count."

They called for the Secretary of the British Legation, and then proceeded on their way to the *Prefettura*. Louisa looked pale and anxious, Helen careworn, for

"What plague is greater than the grief of mind —
The grief of mind that eats in every vein."

"Can you form any idea why the Count has been arrested?" said Mr. Marchmont, at length breaking silence.

"None; unless it be owing to the growth of his beard."

"Very likely," was the quiet answer. "This paternal government finds nothing too trivial to engage its attention where the welfare of its children is concerned; the cut of the beard, and the shape of a hat, are alike full of engrossing interest. I saw a poor fellow the other day, who had been seized in the street, hurried into the shop of the nearest barber, and in a trice denuded of a thick silky beard, which never razor

yet had touched, and which formed the pride of his heart. This was followed by three days' seclusion at the *Prefettura*, after which he was allowed to return to his avocations. Time was money to this unfortunate: he showed me an empty purse. 'See, Signore,' he exclaimed bitterly, 'in three days they have managed to clear that of thirty ducats; I had to pay double and treble for every cup of coffee I required!'

"But the same extortionate system prevails in our own sponging houses, does it not?" asked Helen, with a desperate effort to start some conversation.

"Yes, I fear so. The harpies can bleed their victims as they like. But I think my friend regretted the loss of his beard more than his money, and truly, from thinking him a good-looking man, I was surprised to find him suddenly become downright ugly.

"I hope," he continued after a pause, and addressing the Contessa, "that no papers or letters were seized that could at all prejudice the Count?"

"They took away a packet of letters forming a correspondence the Count had carried on with some foreign literati and men of science, but they can do him no harm."

Mr. Marchmont said nothing.

"The Count has never meddled with politics, but he is liberal-minded in his opinions, and since the congress of the *Scienziati*, which met at Naples several years ago, I believe he has been on intimate terms with many Frenchmen of letters, besides those of other countries."

Helen, for the sake of saying something, asked some questions about this meeting.

"Nay, Helen dear, it was so long before my arrival at Naples, that I know nothing more than the fact of such a gathering of wiseacres having taken place: Naples

was merely selected, in its turn with other cities, as their place of rendezvous. My husband has told me that it made a good deal of commotion at the time, and many public entertainments took place, amongst others a concert at the *Accademia*, to which all sorts went, who could not at other times hope for admission. The *Scienziati* dined at a kind of monster *table d'hôte*, where any one could, on paying, eat his dinner in such distinguished society."

"It is strange that such a meeting should have been allowed," remarked Mr. Marchmont, "because very little encouragement is afforded here to science. At the Exhibition of 1851 no Neapolitans were permitted to compete with the manufacturers of other countries. One man-of-war went over to England and represented this nation, and her officers were quite bewildered at the world wonders that met their eyes in London. The mind of one unfortunate actually gave way temporarily on his return to Naples under the pressure of such unwonted excitement."

They had now reached the *Prefettura*—the Scotland Yard of Naples—and Mr. Marchmont descended to use his interest with the officials, while the two ladies anxiously awaited his return. He rejoined them at length.

"You may come in," he said, "only be cautious what you say. They have not placed our poor friend in one of the *cachots*, I am happy to tell you."

Passing through knots of policemen and *gens d'armes*, who stared insolently at the trembling Englishwomen, they ascended a staircase, than which the Augean stables could not have been more filthy. They were conducted by an official, who, unlocking a door, admitted them into a small dingy room, looking into the

courtyard. Here they found him whom they sought, in company with two other captives.

The Count was pale and haggard; his attire (the suit in which he had been dressed for the dinner-party the preceding evening) was disordered, and bore evidences of his having passed a sleepless night; his chin was close shaven, and doubtless added much to the change in his appearance.

"Oh Luigi!" cried his wife, hurrying towards him, and tears filled her eyes as the Count kissed her wan cheek.

Tears! Louisa shed tears for her elderly, uninteresting husband?

Yes, Louisa was a woman, and in spite of her ill-regulated mind, she still possessed a woman's heart, that tender, foolish, inconsistent thing which forms at once the bane and blessing of her life!

"Good as well as ill,
Woman's at best a contradiction still."

She addressed the Count in French, but he stopped her, speaking himself in Italian.

"Your beard?" she asked, hesitating.

"I shall be cooler without it; you always threatened to cut it off yourself, *Louisa mia!*"

Mr. Marchmont now inquired if he could serve him? If he could point out any mode of clearing up this affair?"

"No, *caro amico*," answered the Count. "I am utterly unconscious of having committed any offence, and therefore must bide my time as patiently as I can. I do not think *you* can benefit me."

The slight emphasis on the word *you* showed Mr. Marchmont that the Count considered the visits of an English diplomatist as being more likely to injure than

to benefit the cause of a suspected Neapolitan. This was likewise his own view of the case, but he could not refuse to accompany the Contessa when she had expressed a wish to that effect.

It was impossible to maintain conversation when each person dreaded lest his words should be distorted by practised listeners, so after a brief and constrained interview, they took their leave; Louisa, in answer to her husband's request, promising to send him clothes and money, assuring him likewise that she would do her best to ascertain what charge was brought against him, and how he could be set free.

All that day she drove about the town, from one Government bureau to another, in fruitless endeavours to discover the reason of her husband's detention, and to obtain his release. She had to give *bottiglie* right and left to get access to the Ministers, and then perchance was put off on some lame excuse or other, and not allowed an interview. She saw the Director of Police, but he only said the Count would not have been imprisoned had there been no charge against him.

"Any charge brought against my husband must be a false one. The vile act of some perjured miscreant!" exclaimed the Contessa with flashing eyes.

Those of the great man glittered unpleasantly at this, and Helen, who still accompanied her, witnessed with dismay the rashness of her friend.

"If the Signor Conte be innocent, he will surely be able to prove as much at his trial."

"His trial!" exclaimed both his dismayed hearers in a breath.

"When will that take place, Monsieur le Directeur?" pursued Louisa, when she had succeeded in repressing her agitation at such a startling announcement.

“Veuillez m’excuser, Madame la Comtesse, mais étant très-occupé aujourd’hui, j’ai l’honneur de vous saluer,” and Monsieur le Directeur, bowing politely to each lady, re-entered his private sanctum.

The Princess returned home, after a day of intense weariness and anxiety on her friend’s account. She found Castelbianco feverishly inquisitive to know where she had been, but on beginning to detail some of the events of the morning, she was quite appalled at the burst of indignant and coarse vituperation, with which he assailed his shrinking, terrified wife.

“Did she wish to implicate *him* in the plottings and schemings of the Conte di Malafede? Had she no thought or care for her husband and child, that she was bent on bringing destruction and ignominy on the house?” And thus he continued to rave and storm, showering abuse upon her stupified head, till she was almost stunned.

In vain she endeavoured to calm his violence, by urging the friendship and good-will he had ever manifested towards the Contessa. “Surely he would not have Helen desert her in such a season of trouble? Had not Louisa nursed and tended his wife, when she was thought to be dying; and was she to be repaid by such base ingratitude? Oh! it was impossible that he could really mean any such thing!”

“Your *dear* friend has never evinced much *simpatia* for *me*, at any rate.”

“Oh Gaetano! don’t be so unjust. Indeed, indeed I cannot behave heartlessly to one who has shown me so much kindness and affection. What danger can befall you from my being seen with Louisa now? We have been much together of late, ever since my illness, and

that alone will account for our intimacy in the world's eyes.

"*Senti, figlia mia,*" he said, coming close up to her. "These notions of yours are doubtless very fine, and proper, and romantic, *ma non mi persuadono affatto, nemmeno un tantinello!*" and he filliped the thumb and two first fingers of his right hand together, Neapolitan fashion, to give force to his words.

"I know the world better than such a baby as you can do; and I know there are eyes and ears everywhere, ready primed to do a *galantuomo* a good turn, and I don't fancy that such a kindness *toccasse alla mia pelle!*"

Helen's colour rose as her husband spoke, and involuntarily she drew up her slender figure, and threw into her expressive eyes all the scorn she felt at such meanness. This was not lost on Castalbiano, who, in spite of himself, for an instant admired her spirit and beauty; but it was as one admires the excitement of a child, which causes its eyes to flash with impotent fury, and its little countenance to kindle with baby indignation. A stern reproof, mayhap the use of a rod, and the feeble opponent sinks into insignificance again.

Just so Castalbiano regarded his wife; what was she but a weak, helpless woman, and how dare such a being thwart his sovereign will, express an opinion, or even hold one separate from his? What did he know of generous impulses — gratitude, charity, kindness, tenderness, and care for others? Was not the care of *number one* more important than all these high sounding virtues put together? And so he watched the frail being that stood before him — possessing a heart and soul, larger far than his tall, *manly* body contained — laughed at her excitement, and toyed with all her kindly feelings; even as a cat plays with a miserable

mouse, so long as it enjoys the sport, and finally, when tired, administers the *patte de grâce*. Thus it came now, his vindictive Italian eyes the while glaring on his helpless prey.

"*Sù! finiamola presto*. Your sentiments may be very fine, *ma non mi convengono*; besides, *mi pare* that *my* will, not yours, is to be your rule of conduct in this house. *Hai capito?*"

Yes, she understood; she had resolutely shut out the truth from her mind and heart for as many months as she could maintain such a contest with her reason. She had sworn to love him, and she had done so in all sincerity and trust; and even now she yearned piteously after her idol. She had promised to honour him; was he not the stronger being, the nobler mind, her lord, her master? She was content in her humility that it should be so, for

". . . imagination bodies forth
The forms of things,"

and she had believed him to be perfect; but now, by his own act, the scales had fallen from her eyes; and she no longer saw "through a glass, darkly." She had vowed to obey him; was she indeed bound to him with bonds of iron, as if a living, impulsive being were chained to a cold, stony, motionless corpse? Was she indeed to "do evil, that good *might* come?" renounce all the generous affections of her nature, all the dictates of religion, because her tyrant ordered, and it was her place to obey?

Oh, no! it was impossible—that could not be expected of her; it would be monstrous, unheard of! And her spirit chafed against its prison bars, and her heart mutinied against the decree.

She passed a sleepless night, a night full of bitterness and despair, which ended in her resolving to seek the Contessa in defiance of her husband's will, early the following morning; but nature was kind to her, and when she lifted her head from the pillow, she found she was too giddy to stand. She tried vainly to dress herself; Jones saw that she was in no fit state to rise.

"Indeed, my Lady, you had better lie down again and try to get asleep—it will do you more good."

"I am afraid I must"—it was said reluctantly; "but, if the Contessa di Malafede call, be sure she is not sent away: bring her into my room." And the poor girl lay down again and fairly wept herself to sleep.

The Contessa did call, and learnt with dismay from faithful, anxious Jones that Helen was again ill; but, unlike the maid, she wisely attributed the evil to mental rather than to bodily ailment. She tried hard to prevent her being disturbed, but Jones said she knew her mistress would be angry if she failed to do her bidding, and so the two compounded matters by Louisa offering to watch by the Princess's bedside against her waking.

She did so; and when Helen, after a heavy, uneasy sleep, opened her eyes they rested on the anxious countenance of her friend.

"Oh, Louisa, I intended to go to you, but I was unable, my head ached too much."

"Dearest, I do not doubt your kindness. But I am sure your head aches yet; lie still, do not speak now, and I will return later in the day and tell you if I have any news."

"But, Louisa, I feared I should not see you—that you would not be admitted to me—and I am determined, whatever Gaetano may say to the contrary, to be of all the service to you that I can."

Poor Helen was too feverish and excited to weigh her words: she felt aggrieved and ill-treated by her husband, and was nervously anxious lest her friend should think her former solicitude had been thrown away upon a selfish, calculating spirit. And so it came about that she divulged a great part of her trouble—of Gaetano's unkindness and cruel language; it was the outpouring of a heart oppressed almost to bursting. She was solitary in her foreign home, she found no sympathy from any; she was scorned and looked down upon by the Neapolitans for her difference of religion, while her husband no longer evinced any affection for her, though she had joyfully given up all—parents, country, friends for him.

Even her child, her own flesh and blood, was—as she could not help feeling—separated from her by invisible barriers, and would be taught, as soon as it could lisp or understand any thing, to hold its *heretic* mother in contempt!

All this came upon her at once with the irresistible force of conviction; what wonder, then, if she “cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry?”

Nevertheless she did amiss; and had she been “in *her* right mind,” Helen would have felt instinctively, with her usually clear perception between right and wrong, that there exists one sacred relation of life—that between man and wife—in which it is not good to take counsel of friends, but only of God and one's own heart.

Louisa said nothing for a while, but sat with her hands clasped on her knees, looking at the fire, as if she would fain seek an answer to her thoughts in its cheery blaze. The wood crackled briskly and the flame danced in the open chimney, telling mockingly of home and

comfort where neither existed ; of "Peace ; and there was no peace."

"And yet," she began abruptly, as if carrying on the thread of her previous meditations, "many quiet English girls, brought up in the monotony of a country life, would give up all the blessings they possess for the chance of marrying one of these Counts and Princes ! Poor little fools ; the moth flies to the glowing candle and meets destruction, these grasp at a title and — Helen !" she said desperately, "whatever misery happens to us, we shall only get our deserts !"

Helen shivered, and conscience having awakened, she began to feel sorry for the openness with which she had spoken.

"Not you, though, poor darling ; you were such a child when you married, that if your mother had done her duty by you, she would have whipped you first and then sent you supperless to bed. That would have cured your love," and she laughed drearily. "But I was a woman ; I knew what I was about, and embraced my fate with my eyes open, and I therefore repeat that if I am not happy, I neither deserve nor indeed expected to be so."

Helen, with all her woman's pride returning, did not wish Louisa to suppose that her love for Castalbiano had been a mere passing fancy, already repented of. She did not like to hear another commiserate her ill-starred lot : had she not chosen it determinedly against the kindest advice of her dearest and best friends ? She held them quite clear of responsibility, and was a wee bit provoked at being esteemed such a perfect child, unable to judge between good and evil. She must have spoken very wrongly to awaken such thoughts in her friend's mind ; formerly it had been her privilege to

comfort Louisa and reason her out of her despair, and now *she* had been uttering complaints against Gaetano, as if he were a brute towards her and she did not love him !

Helen will be thought capricious and unreasonable ; she was only ill, weak, and nervous, and it was sad to see such a morbid state of mind in one so young.

" I must have said more than I intended or wished to imply—it was wrong in me—you must not imagine that I do not love Gaetano ; it is all my fault ; if I only knew better how to please him ! " She sat up in bed and rested her throbbing temples in her hands.

" It would be idle and wicked in either of us to murmur as if there were no hope or remedy—there must be both ; I will try to find them," and she motioned as though wishing to rise and commence her weary search.

" Helen, you are an angel ! " cried the Contessa earnestly. " Try to make me better than I am."

" Nay, Louisa, I must improve myself first."

CHAPTER XVI.

CASTELBIANCO so far relented from his first indignation as to allow his wife to receive her friend's visits, and occasionally to go to her house in turn; but he put an unqualified *veto* to her accompanying the Contessa to the Prefettura, or in any of her despairing researches after justice, in a land where, in ordinary cases, it was only dispensed to the *highest bidder*, and in political ones *not at all*.

It may appear strange that a quiet individual like the Conte di Malafede should have been so suddenly and summarily disposed of; a man of good family, yet of retired habits; one, too, who found ample occupation among his books and papers, to prevent his wishing to enter public life. But at Naples books and letters failed of being duly appreciated, they prompted inquiry which was undesirable: correspondence with *l'estero*, which must be checked, as opinions and ideas flowed in thence which might leaven the whole mass of corruption yclept the State; liberty of thought and conscience, than which no schemes could be more Utopian or baneful to the public good.

However, neither of these several reasons could be assigned in this instance as the true cause of the Conte's detention, though they might serve as a laudable excuse why a secret enemy should serve his own ends, and do the Government good service at one and the same time. We have seen that the Contessa attributed the act to Baron Torlone, but how trace it to the real author

in a land where no one confides in his fellow-man? where a father will not trust his son, a mother her daughter? "for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."

At the end of the week Louisa proceeded as usual to the Prefettura to see her husband. She was received with but scant attention and insolent looks, and her application was abruptly answered —

"The Conte is no longer permitted to see his friends."

"Is he still here — in the room he has hitherto occupied?" was the anxious inquiry.

She was answered by a coarse expression, signifying that such quarters were much too good for people of his stamp!

The poor lady trembled excessively as she stood in that dirty archway, with a noisy guard-room on one side, whence soldiers and *sbirri* came to stare rudely at the handsome Signora Contessa, to gaze with the cool effrontery which every common Neapolitan thinks his right where a woman is concerned. These wretches now "dressed in a little brief authority," joked and laughed, and commented aloud, while the Englishwoman submitted to their insolence with varying cheeks, now scarlet with repressed indignation, anon white as the kerchief in her hand, as she thought of her husband's barbarous fate.

"Where have they removed the Conte, in mercy tell me?" and she pressed a large douceur into the guard's readily extended palm. "Is he still at the Prefettura? is he in one of those chambers yonder?" and she pointed across the court to the low dark archway, where a small bolted door led to the regions of despair.

"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate!"

The man examined the silver deliberately, pocketed

it, and then for the first time his eyes assumed a more compassionate expression. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Che volete, Signora Contessa? If he be there," and he pointed with his thumb over his left shoulder, "ebbene, non sarà per sempre — speriamolo almeno!"

Louisa turned away sick at heart, and ordered the coachman to drive to Mr. Marchmont's, but with the best will in the world the secretary could not assist her.

As an Englishwoman, she was entitled to the interference and protection of her Minister; both were extended to her readily, and every trial made to obtain the reversal of her husband's sentence; but in vain. They were informed that he would be tried, but *when* they could not learn; also, what accusation would be brought against him, and by whom, there was no power of knowing. The first thing to be done was to procure efficient council for the defence, but this, in spite of the handsome retaining fee gladly offered by the Contessa, they were long in effecting. No one liked to risk life and liberty in vindication of a political offender, for as such the Conte was ostensibly regarded. The lawyers were many of them earnest and willing to defend the right, ready to sacrifice their own persons in the cause, but they had wives and families dependent upon them, aged parents, perhaps, or helpless sisters, and could they involve these in the common ruin?

At length one young advocate was found who undertook the responsibility; he was a beginner, and could not resist the temptation offered by the money, he was alone, and thus no one shared his risk.

In Helen's true affection and concern, the poor Contessa found sympathy and support for her failing spirits. Let it not be supposed that from utter indifference

towards her husband, Louisa had grown suddenly to *love* him. No; the marriage had been one of pure convenience on either side, though this end had not been attained. The Conte having reaped the benefit of her fortune, allowed his wife to go her own way; he was not the sort of man to enjoy the excitement of a pretty young wife, her presence too often bored and perplexed him, and he gladly sought shelter in the retirement of his own little study from her capricious spirits, now all life and animation, the next instant, plunged into what was very like despair. Louisa married in a fit of recklessness, while smarting under a recent bitter mortification; she grasped at a life-long misery to escape from a temporary evil. Like too many women, a false pride incited her to her destruction, and she had only regretted the deed *once*, though, truth to say, her husband was not unkind to her. But is that *all* that is necessary in marriage? Opposite as the two poles in tastes, opinions, habits, and ideas, — one old, heavy, and phlegmatic, the other young, passionate, excitable. How reconcile such discordant elements?

And yet such is woman's nature, the Contessa, now that he was in trouble and alone, felt daily more kindly towards this hitherto despised husband. He stood in the light of a father to one who had none, who had scarcely a mother, for Louisa had no scope for her affections in her own family.

Latterly, during her constant visits to the Prefettura, the Conte had evinced more care and affection for his wife than usual: he expressed much anxiety about her future, and was so grateful for her exertions in his own favour, that she was touched by his gentler manners. Kind expressions coming from one who is not profuse in demonstration have a singular value in the eyes of

the recipient, and thus Louisa's heart was softened alike by her husband's tenderness and his misfortunes. The unjust usage he received roused all her English spirit, and at the same time she experienced a growing sense of self-reproach for the neglect, nay contempt, with which she had too often treated him. Many were the slighting words and deeds that now rose unbidden to her memory,—vivid was the consciousness of all her faults and unworthiness towards one who had shown her only kindness and consideration!

Alas! repentance often comes when it is *too late*. We have all read the experiences of those rescued from the terrors of a watery grave. Amid the final and agonising rush of water which press overwhelmingly on the ears, when death appears imminent, and hope of salvation there seems none,—then, in those few minutes, instants rather, all the dread past rises vividly to mind, and, like the shifting scenes of a magic lantern, passes in terrible review. Events all but forgotten, faults and errors esteemed venial at the time, and as such neglected; idle words and idler thoughts,—all show themselves in fearful array, hurrying onwards to the judgment seat, there to cry in terrible accusation—"Thou art the man!"

Even so when the near, if not dear, one is removed, how loudly conscience knocks for admittance and a hearing! Words, tones, looks, all rise in condemnation against the trembling mortal: how cruel the remembrance, how bitter the repentance! And oftentimes it comes *too late*, though sought for "carefully with tears." Who shall describe that agony of remorse and self-reproach? And yet all must have experienced it in a greater or lesser degree.

And is there, indeed, "no place of repentance?"

Yes, blessed be God, there is One, Who "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

Gradually, but surely, the unhappy lady found herself shunned by most of her smart and noble acquaintances, who were conveniently blind whenever she crossed their path, either in her walks or drives. She was no longer *the fashion*, and those who were desirous of showing their devotion to the superior powers, were ever careful at the same time to tread down still lower those upon whom fortune frowned. It is really interesting, as a triumph of Art over Nature, to observe the cool nonchalance and unconsciousness with which Neapolitans can *cut* their dear friends. Talking, laughing and gazing at everything but the *black sheep* in their way, they walk along with head erect, and dashing gait, utterly ignoring him whom the preceding night at a *conversazione*, they overpowered with compliments and civilities. And when, suffering from this wound so humiliating to his self-love, the victim treats his opponents to a look of withering scorn at the next meeting, he is again annoyed and confounded at receiving familiar nods and smiles, as if they were on the most intimate and happy terms possible! So variable are these *good-natured* people, that no chameleon can change colour oftener or more suddenly under passing influences; no bubble in mid-air, blown hither and thither by every varying zephyr, can be lighter or more capricious in its movements.

Unhappily for her peace of mind, Louisa's character was calculated to smart keenly from such treatment. Though incapable of entering into gaieties under the

unfortunate circumstances in which her husband was placed, she had nevertheless, through life, sought refuge from *herself* and *thought* in the whirl of society; in the multitude of acquaintances,—she did not ask for *friends*,—she strove to relieve a heavy heart and obtain forgetfulness. Vain hope! for what solitude is more depressing than that produced by a crowd?

Her generous nature—incapable in itself of baseness—revolted from the unjust treatment which she experienced; and she poured forth her wrongs and the increasing misery of her lot into Helen's pitying ears, with a vehemence of regret for the past, and despair for the future, which filled the bosom of that gentle creature with grief and compassion. Earnestly, unceasingly, she strove to guide her poor friend's excited thoughts into a better and a higher channel; endeavoured to make her seek peace of mind at that Fount of Mercy, from whence alone it ever really and enduringly flows; but here also she met with a painful stumbling-block.

Louisa's tardily awakened conscience was struck with bitter remorse at having forsaken her own pure Church under the mere influence of passion, and to serve a worldly end. Brought up at a not very first-rate boarding school, religion in her early youth had been learnt like other lessons; so many pages of the Bible were read daily, as a matter of course, and listened to or not, following the impulse of the moment. Then came Sunday, a long, dull day, marked by duller sermons and the absence of some of the more fortunate scholars at their homes. The time arrived for Louisa to return to what was hers in name, and there religion certainly was not esteemed the "one thing" needful. In London she once visited a Roman Catholic chapel, where the flowers, music, and lights pleased

her sight and captivated her imagination, and she thought that religion, clad in such a garb, might be not only endurable but pleasant. The few English she met professing that faith were educated persons possessing seemingly liberal views. They took an interest in answering the questions which curiosity prompted her to put to them; and she who knew little of controversy, and thought less on the matter, was quite ready to comply with the Conte di Malafede's requirement of a change of religion, when the furtherance of her own ends depended on such a step.

Removed from her own enlightened happy country, and plunged suddenly into the darkness of Southern Italy, where ignorance and bigotry—idolatry was almost penned—have their strongholds, Louisa awoke to the consciousness of her sin, and then her position was pitiable indeed. Unlike Helen, whose Protestantism was open and acknowledged, the Contessa was forced to fulfil her own words, spoken thoughtlessly and lightly at the time—and “bow *herself* in the house of Rimmon,” unsupported by an approving conscience. She had never been taught in the days of innocence *where* to solicit pardon and guidance out of the gloom surrounding her spirit, and now she could only give vent to passionate regrets and despairing tears which her friend could with difficulty calm. And yet Helen's love and simple faith constituted her the best adviser that Louisa could have found at such a time—better, perhaps, than the most learned divine or most skilful controversialist.

But the Princess's anxiety on her friend's account was heightened by the dread of an evil which she saw gathering even as “a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand.”

To this the Contessa was either in reality, or consciously blind. Helen could not tell which; and she had not resolution or cruelty sufficient to sound her on the subject.

Little Pepito was his mother's darling, and daily improved in good looks. He had Louisa's fine large eyes, which, however, varied strangely in expression, now presenting complete apathy to all surrounding objects, then flashing with impotent childish passion, as his baby form shook with impatience at the smallest contradiction. On these occasions he made good use of his fists, as his unlucky nurse's face bore constant evidence, but all her efforts to calm him were generally fruitless.

Soothing words, songs, and all the rhetoric of that singular phraseology peculiar to the nursery, which to the uninitiated is almost as difficult of comprehension as Sanscrit itself,—to all such insinuating addresses Pepito was resolutely unheeding. Then in despair, almost anger, at her ill-success, his victim would be forced to appeal to his mother, who, with a reproachful look, would instantly calm the child's wrath, and then he would cling to her tightly, twining his little arms round the fond neck, and laying his rosy cheek caressingly, irresistibly, against hers.

Louisa almost idolised the boy, though she marked his passionate disposition with sorrow. Still in spite of his manifest affection, even her familiar voice availed not to amuse or quiet him, her eyes alone had any influence, and it was this fact, — though, as before said, unnoticed by the mother, — which made her friend anxious.

Pepito was now nearly a year old, and his smartly attired *baglia* had already received numerous handsome dresses and trinkets, besides donations of money, to

mark, according to Neapolitan custom, the young gentleman's first walk alone—the first single or double tooth, and many other eras in infantine history. As yet, however, he had made no attempts at speech; not even the grand accomplishment of *mamma, papa*, a feat that always fills the hearts of exulting parents with pride and rejoicing. He cried lustily enough, which went to prove the strength of his lungs, and at times also, when angry, he gave utterance to noises which, though unintelligible, were most disagreeable to the ear.

"I am afraid," said the Contessa laughingly, on one of these occasions, after she and Helen had witnessed such an ebullition of wrath, "I am afraid Pepito will be true to his nationality, and have a veritable Neapolitan voice. It will be very provoking, for the men are usually more favoured in this respect than the women. You must be taught to modulate your tones, little monkey!" she continued, smothering the child with kisses.

Helen made no remark, but her eyes were riveted searchingly on the pair.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Ecco 'na seccatura!" exclaimed Castelbianco crossly, as, entering his wife's sitting-room one afternoon, he threw himself at full length—dirty boots included—on a sofa.

He was accompanied by one of his intimates, Count Giulio, who advanced immediately to the Principessa, Castelbianco evidently regarding him as *l'ami de la maison*, and allowing him to take care of himself.

"Che c'è di nuovo?" asked Helen of the Count, "and what is this vexation you allude to?" turning to her husband.

"Why his Royal Highness, the old Principe di S——, is dying or dead,—the theatres are ordered to be closed, and we shall have *un tutto stretto* in carnival time, —se fosse Quaresima almeno!"

"Oh! is that all?" said Helen, with a somewhat relieved smile.

"*Is that all!* mais, Madame la Princesse, how can you be so indifferent?"

"Indeed, Monsieur le Comte, I regret this event sincerely, for the sake of his Royal Highness' amiable family, but I don't see that you gentlemen need trouble yourselves much about a court mourning; it will fall more heavily on our sex, whose dresses, for instance, will be useless this season, and out of fashion the next.

"Ah! a pretty sum yours will cost me," muttered

her husband, with a growl of displeasure, "and now I suppose you'll be ordering new black clothes."

Poor Helen coloured at such a coarse address in presence of a stranger, but she was too generous to consider whose money it was that paid her husband's as well as her own expenses. She answered quietly, therefore, "You forget, Gaetano, that I am already in mourning for your mother."

Count Giulio fidgetted: it is not pleasant to form a third at a matrimonial difference of opinion.

"Madame —— is *au désespoir*; her ball which was to have come off to-night, must now be postponed, for none of us Neapolitans can attend. It is the more vexing as she had fixed on last evening when La Marchesa —— begged her, as a great favour, to yield it to her; she did so, and now she is disappointed. La Marchesa —— was sending to the palace for tidings every half hour yesterday, in an agony of fright lest the death should take place. You will go to see the lying in state?" he continued, brightening up at the prospect of such a *divertimento* in lieu of the ball.

"Oh, no! I do not like such exhibitions, they sicken me. Death is sacred, and the poor body should not be tricked out in fine clothes for all the vulgar to stare at. Surely the old man has been seen daily for so many years, that people might dispense with a sight of him now."

"Ugh! pazzie! How sentimental you are sometimes, Elena. What everybody goes to look at, you might also, *mi pare*."

She was silent for a few minutes; whatever she said appeared to be wrong that day.

"Madame la Princesse is right, I think," was the polite remark of Count Giulio, anxious to win favour in

the lady's eyes. "But in this case I do not believe her good feelings will be shocked, as only a wax figure is likely to be exposed."

"Another reason for staying away," said Helen, trying to laugh; "there is nothing very extraordinary to see in a doll drest up in uniform, reposing in a darkened room, smelling strongly of wax candles. I have heard that some curious ceremonies were observed when the late Queen lay in state, will they be repeated now?"

"*Non vi saprei dire*, but that was a hard time for the court ladies to which you allude. They took it by turns, four and four about, to sit by her Majesty's bedside, and at intervals carried on the farce of offering her a shawl or a cup of coffee, till the time arrived for removing the body to the church, when her Majesty's coachman entered, and asked her nine times if she required her carriage. No answer being returned as you may imagine, he then broke nine whips and Sua Maestà was declared to be dead."

"*Ah! la buon' anima di Mammà* was one of those unlucky attendants," said Castelbianco, "I remember she was very ill afterwards, for they had to walk in procession to Sta. Chiara accompanying the body; they wore thin shoes and stockings, caps and veils, while the mud was up to their knees and the rain *un diluvio*. At the church they had to keep watch other twenty-four hours, four hours at a time. That was one sure way of killing off one's subjects!"

"It is the Spanish ceremonial which prevails here," said the Count.

"What shocking mummery!" exclaimed Helen. "There is no idea in this country of the decency due to the dead, some are made a raree show of, and others are treated with ignominy! I lately saw two poor

funerals, each of which distressed me greatly; I could not get the remembrance of them out of my mind. One was seeing a hearse stationary in this street, where it waited a long time, till a body was brought out of a house some distance off, not in a coffin, but wrapped only in a sheet, and carried thus by two men to the hearse. The other was in the Toledo at the gayest time of day, when a body laid on a board, and borne along on the heads of two *facchini*, passed the carriage, as I was waiting at a shop door. A cloth covered the corpse, but the form was clearly discernible, and every step of the bearers shook it visibly. The horrid thought struck me, if either of those men were to stumble!"

"*Bella mia*, you had better turn away your eyes next time, otherwise I fear such sights will often distress you. The poor are not treated to coffins, which are reserved for their betters."

"But surely when we see those grand processions with priests, and gold-embroidered velvet palls,—the people who can afford *that* expense have coffins?" asked the Princess.

Count Giulio shook his head, "That parade extends only to the Church, and in order to ensure it, the poor people willingly subscribe a trifle during their lives to a confraternity. But when the prayers are over and the brotherhood have retired, you would see some *facchini* remove an open shell from that showy catafalco, and add one more to the heap of poor humanity, waiting in a dark corner for the nightly round of the hearse! A muttered Pater Noster at the brink of one of the 365 pits in the cemetery, and that is the finale! The clothes are the perquisite of the custode of the Campo Santo."

Helen turned away sick and faint, and Count Giulio

anxiously apologised for having distressed her, but Castelbianco laughed and told him not to mind, for the sooner Elena's nerves were hardened the better. She made no remark, but with a grateful bow to the Count for his consideration, quitted the room.

Notwithstanding the distress the event occasioned to the ball-going, and ball-giving world, Sua Altezza Reale died and lay in state, and so afforded some pastime at least to atone for the sudden cessation of lighter amusements. Still people said the exhibition was very shabby, and were proportionally disappointed at the few rooms hung with black velvet, and at the scanty attendance of mourners and officials. They declared, moreover, that only a wax figure was exposed to their curious gaze, a most unfair proceeding.

Helen kept away from this sight, but hearing that the funeral ceremonial would be worth attending, she agreed to go with her husband to the church on the morning in question.

They reached Sta. Chiara at ten o'clock, accompanied by Count Giulio, to whom Castelbianco gladly resigned the care of the Princess, as, quitting their carriage at a little distance from the entrance (the narrow street being almost impassable from the throng of vehicles), they elbowed their way to the great door. There they encountered another delay, as the municipality had just arrived in their handsome state gilt coaches, now covered with black crape, and drawn by four or six greys driven by postilions.

Our friends with other people were compelled to witness the entrance of these worthies before they could effect their own, and Helen decided rightly, that their dress,—long, flowing black robes with brown wigs curling over their shoulders, and bags—was very *simpatica*.

Never having seen the Lord Mayor in his finery, she could not institute a comparison, though the latter perhaps lost nothing from her active imagination.

On entering the crowded edifice it appeared enveloped in almost impenetrable gloom, so great was the contrast to the broad sunlight without; and indeed the lower part of the choir, in the rear of the immense catafalque which occupied its centre, was left totally unlit, while the vaulted roof was equally lost in thick darkness.

Castelbianco's dress of a court chamberlain, worn also by Count Giulio, passed them without difficulty to front seats on the right, reserved for officials and the corps diplomatique. All these were in full uniform, while the ladies were in deep mourning with black veils thrown over their heads, a graceful costume which rendered many a plain face almost handsome, and became all figures.

The high altar was brilliantly lit and ornamented, and facing it was erected the catafalque, ascended by numerous steps; on these, and supported on pillars, were placed boxes of moss containing short, thick wax candles. On an inclined couch of velvet embroidered with gold, rested the huge iron-bound chest covered with white leather, that enclosed the mortal remains of royalty. On each side a large female figure was stationed. One the Virgin holding the Child, the other Sta. Chiara with her left hand raised and the right clasping the cross. At the four corners of the bier stood a *garde du corps* with arms reversed, so motionless, that all resembled statues, rather than living breathing men.

The church was hung with black velvet ornamented with gold *fleurs de lis* and crowns, and lighted at the sides by thick wax candles in bronze chandeliers

gleaming from out the darkness which rested above, a gold cross embroidered on the velvet canopy that hung suspended over all, was visible by fitful glimpses, as if to remind one amidst all this false glitter and parade in honour of royalty now reduced to mere dust and ashes—of that brighter and real splendour reserved on High for “the elect of God,” “a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

Ecclesiastics mustered in crowds, headed by four cardinals in scarlet silk gowns and trains, four archbishops wearing curious mitres, canons with fur tippetts, and numbers of the minor brethren in their varied attire. There was a large orchestra on either side, one belonging to the church, the other to the Chapel Royal, while a military band was stationed behind the altar.

Our party had some time to wait before the service commenced, and many people had been patiently biding this moment for several weary hours, forced to be early on the spot, in order to secure good seats.

At length a prolonged burst from all the instruments at once broke the solemn stillness; rising and increasing in volume, the sound, like a roll of thunder, filled the immense edifice, and amid its gloomy aspect, sent a strange thrill into all hearts. A chorus of many voices added its startling melody to the music, and at that instant few patures were so impassive as to resist the influence of the scene.

The altar and catafalque blazing with light, rendered more brilliant by some preparation with which the candles were constantly fed; the united forces of many instruments rending the heavy air; the full voices of the singers; the gorgeously dressed prelates surrounding the altar, and the splendid uniforms of the officials; the soldiers watching motionless by the dead; the

many gratings filled with shadowy nuns; the massive velvet hangings, casting a gloom over all, and even tempering the myriad wax lights; the kneeling figures of women wrapped in their long black veils; and overhead the large gold cross, glancing fitfully through the gloom!

"The Roman Catholic ceremonial has many advantages over ours;" remarked Helen, in a whisper, to Mr. Marchmont during a pause. "Our Burial Service is very simple compared to this."

"True, Madame la Princesse. Yet though our beautiful service is so simple, it is most impressive, and we attend more to consistence than do these good people. Look, for instance, at those common *facchini*, who are feeding the lights on the altar, and hovering about the body collecting the wax; we should scarce suffer such a *gaucherie* at Westminster Abbey, under similar circumstances!"

"Hardly, indeed!" she answered with a smile.

"But what is that?" she continued with a slight start, as a sharp grating sound broke the temporary stillness.

Turning round, they beheld a *facchino*, or *lazzarone*, dragging a common deal table across the marble pavement, till he attained the space in front of the altar. Here he was a long time, ere he could fix it to his entire satisfaction, turning it round and round, regardless of the excruciating noise it occasioned, and the incongruity of this *tableau vivant* altogether, at such a time, and in such a place.

Helen watched his proceedings with much curiosity, and Mr. Marchmont was evidently equally interested, but everybody else was content to bide the issue regarding the whole as a mere matter of course.

"I fear you came to a hasty conclusion just now," said Mr. Marchmont. "It is clear that the good man cannot settle the table to his taste, yet as nobody interferes with him, I suppose he is orthodox in his movements. I wonder what will come of them?"

In spite of the mournful occasion, and her own sombre attire, Helen could not resist a sense of the ludicrous, and now, with difficulty, restrained a strong inclination to laugh.

But the *facchino* at length succeeded in steadying his deal table, after he had dragged it to and fro, and round and round, in the most nerve-grating fashion, during the very climax of the ceremony. It was then covered with a yellow cloth, intended to represent cloth of gold.

Ten servants now ascended the steps of the catafalque and proceeded to carry the enormous chest to this very table. His Royal Highness the Prince of S——, being an immensely stout man, this was no light burden to move, and in order to carry out the saying,— "A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together;" the men repeatedly gave the Neapolitan cry of "*Aizza!*" with genuine expression and lusty lungs.

Helen fairly laughed now. All her religious feelings were put to flight on a sudden, and the ludicrous usurped their place. Mr. Marchmont was also greatly amused at the incongruous scene, but the natives regarded the whole programme as being quite *en règle*.

"Montez, montez, Madame la Princesse!" cried Count Giulio, and suiting the action to the words, he assisted Helen to stand on the bench they occupied.

She had scarcely attained this elevation, when the coffin was hoisted on the table amid repeated *aizza's*, and the lid being raised, the body was exposed to

view through an inner glass top. The Prince dressed in full uniform, reposed on a bed, a pillow supporting his head, and his hands, covered with white gloves, crossed on his breast. A court chamberlain then advanced, and was asked by one of the archbishops three successive times, whether that was the body of his Royal Highness the Prince of S——? Receiving no reply, the prelate at length said—

“*Non rispondete?*”

“Being then answered in the affirmative, the case was locked with three separate keys, one belonging to his Majesty; another to the family of his Royal Highness; and a third pertaining to the Church of Sta. Chiara. The coffin was then removed *pro tem.* to a side chapel, after which, a laudatory sermon was preached by Padre Grossi, (brother of the author of “Marco Visconti,”) a personage who at that time shared the favourable opinion of the Neapolitans, with a certain *Padre Facchini*, a native of Lombardy, as one might tell by his saying *vuomo*, instead of *uomo*. The latter had one decided recommendation in his favour—that of painting the female character in the most glowing colours.

The Prince of S—— was much loved by the poor, to whom he was always generous, and charity covereth “a multitude of sins.”

The long wearisome service being now ended, the crowd gradually dispersed, and the Castalbancos, amongst others, regained their carriage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HELEN never made a promise without intending to fulfil it, and thus when she assured Mrs. Harford that she would endeavour to visit her at the convent, she only said what she really meant to perform. Hitherto, however, she had been unable to keep her word. On returning to town, all her thoughts were for a time engrossed by the approaching separation from her parents; and it is not to be wondered at if that subject drove all others from her mind. .

Poor girl, she could not look beyond such a trouble; a perfect blank in existence threatened to befall her after parting from her dearly loved mother.

Afterwards she was made to forget herself in caring for Louisa, and her unselfish spirit sought for peace in trying to impart it to those who stood in greater need of it for the time being than herself. Now, however, she could do nothing for her friend. Louisa must wait and trust in Providence, like the many worn spirits that were similarly tried by a ruthless Government. No mite of hope was divided among that famishing crew to satisfy their cravings; no word of advice or instruction was given as to the best means calculated to free their dear ones, so that in action those bleeding hearts might find relief. Alike fearful of betraying their doubts and fears as to the final result, and of involving themselves and their families in greater ruin by evincing too

much interest in the fate of the victims, these unfortunate beings fulfilled Alfieri's words

"Soffrir tacermi
Deggío; e soffro, e mi taccio!"

Helen learnt on inquiry that Miss Harford had taken the veil at the Convent of Sta. —, which the mother had also entered as a lay sister. Before doing so, however, the latter had called upon the Princess, who was still absent from Naples, (for whom she left a message,) begging her to visit her when she could.

There was some difficulty in procuring the necessary permission from Rome. Castalbiano was too indifferent and careless to exert himself to gratify any of "Elena's whims," as he called them. Padre Calvi was away from Naples, and had he been even at hand Helen rather doubted the probability of his furthering her wish to gain access to a nun. Don Dominico had no interest or power to assist her; her husband was the only person that could do for her what she required, and therefore, in spite of cross words and sundry rebuffs for pestering him, she persisted in her request, till, at length, in order to be rid of the worry, he consented to write to his uncle, the Cardinal, at Rome.

After some further trouble and delay, the order was granted, and Helen gladly prepared to pay her long-promised visit.

The convent was placed in a healthy and beautiful situation on a hill-side, and though the entrance was only attainable by a dirty lane, whose steep ascent precluded the possibility of reaching it in a carriage, yet the nuns could enjoy a glorious view, embracing the entire bay, with the orange and lemon groves of the Vomero and Posilipo, from their grated windows. A

large garden was attached to this — *prison*; for what else can it be called? — how often the poor captives were permitted to revel in its sweets, we are unable to state. But seldom, we should think, judging by the strict rule prevailing at Santa —

Helen placed her card, and the all-potent permit in the *rota*, a species of closed wheel inserted in the wall, by which means, letters and parcels could be received by the inmates without their being seen themselves. After a short delay, the massive convent portals were opened by an aged lay sister, who showed the Princess into a small passage room, where a few common chairs constituted the sole furniture. A large double grating occupied the chief part of one side of this comfortless apartment, but a thick black curtain beyond it effectually concealed whatever it might have disclosed to view. The walls were white-washed, the pavement was bare and chilly on that wintry day, and the whole aspect of the spot was dreary in the extreme.

Helen's thoughts had time to dwell on the extraordinary perversion of religion which such establishments exhibit. Our blessed Saviour neither shunned the society of His fellow-men, nor taught His followers so to do. He came "eating and drinking," joining in the marriage rejoicings of some of His disciples, and in the festive entertainments of others. He neither required that men should "make broad their phylacteries," nor "for a pretence make long prayer" that they might "be seen of men." He sent His followers into the busy world, to "fight the good fight of faith," clothed with "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." Is it not cowardly, therefore, to shrink from the battle of life, instead of glorying in the struggle, and making "the trial of *our* faith?"

Helen's ruminations were suddenly dissipated by the partial drawing back of the curtain on the other side of the grating. She perceived a shadowy form beyond, but indistinctly, for the light was only admitted from the passage where she was, the rest of the apartment being comparatively dark.

"You wished to see me, I believe, *Madame la Princesse*," said a cold voice in measured tones.

"Miss Harford?" inquired Helen quickly.

"I am Sister Agatha now."

"Yes. I was anxious to fulfil my promise to your mother, and only regret that unavoidable circumstances have prevented my coming earlier."

"The Lady Abbess has kindly permitted me to accede to your wish," and as the nun spoke, Helen became aware that another figure stood in the shadow of the curtain, concealed from sight, but a silent witness of the interview. This discovery chilled her. How could she converse freely while conscious of the presence of a spy upon her words?

"You have been here but a short time, I believe?"

"Three blessed months."

"And Mrs. Harford is with you? What a comfort for you not to be separated from her, and what devotion to her child she evinces in thus secluding herself to be near her!"

"I did not wish my mother to follow me: she can be nothing to me any more. Christ is my Lord, and heaven is my home; what have I to do with earthly parents or relations?"

Helen was thoroughly chilled, and even afraid to speak, sure that she should commit some flagrant breach of propriety.

"Our blessed Saviour Himself tells us to honour our

father and mother, and says, 'in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.'"

"The Holy Church does not allow any private interpretation of Scripture. We are commanded to forsake *all* and follow Christ, and I have done so."

"Are you happy?" after a dubious pause.

"Unutterably so," answered the calm voice.

"I hope I shall be permitted to see Mrs. Harford?"

"She shall be informed of your presence here, and I will now retire. May the Holy Virgin and the Saints instruct you, and have you in their keeping! Farewell."

The black curtain was closely drawn, and Helen found herself again alone, in that cold waiting-room.

Sister Agatha struck her as being a very disagreeable specimen of a *good woman*, and she could not help wondering why so many people enjoying the reputation of super-excellence contrive to render themselves and their virtues so distasteful to their neighbours? It was quite a puzzle, and one that she had often solved *Gordian* fashion, by laying the blame to her own evil nature, which was unable to appreciate such saintly personages.

"Oh! Madame la Princesse, how kind of you to come and see me!" exclaimed the friendly voice of Mrs. Harford from behind the grating. So saying she drew the curtain quite back and thus letting in more light, a kind of parlour was disclosed to view, very plainly and scantily furnished, but considerably larger than the *salle d'attente* where Helen sat and shivered.

"I fear you will have thought me a very forgetful person," said Helen, "but indeed I was unable to visit you sooner."

"Better late than never at any rate; besides you have doubtless many calls on your time. With us, every day resembles its predecessor, as though stereotyped."

"I am glad that your daughter seems satisfied with her choice."

"More than satisfied — she is now quite happy."

"And you, dear Mrs. Harford?" was the anxious inquiry.

"Thank Heaven! I am also more peaceful and resigned. While there was any uncertainty, I was always hoping that the final irrevocable step might not be taken, and was nervously anxious to prevent its fulfilment. Now all is settled, and my mind is less restless."

"Do you see much of your daughter?"

"Alas! no; we meet in the chapel during the hours of prayer, but there we may not converse, of course; and sometimes I am allowed to go to her cell, though not often; however, I am near her and under the same roof. Sister Agatha is already looked upon as almost a saint, her zeal and devotion are so excessive."

"The rule of this order is very severe, is it not?" asked Helen.

"Yes, it is the strictest order for women that exists; but many of the duties enjoined have been gradually relaxed, and Florence is bent on restoring them. She encounters some opposition."

"No wonder!" was the Princess's heartfelt exclamation. "Why not leave well alone?"

Mrs. Harford gave an audible sigh, but made no answer.

"What is the dress? Your daughter was so concealed by that curtain, that I could not see her distinctly."

"It is composed entirely of wool — every article; winter and summer it is worn alike, and during the latter season it must be most distressing; it is also painful to have it next one's skin in this climate, and not even a linen pocket handkerchief is allowed!"

"Oh! what misery."

"Still there is peace here, 'which the world cannot give.'"

Poor Helen could truly affirm that *she* had not found it in the world, yet she doubted whether this mother and daughter were not pursuing the shadow for the substance.

After some further conversation Helen rose to take leave, when Mrs. Harford presented her with a pamphlet containing an account of the daughter's miraculous conversion from the errors of her ways.

The Princess accepted it, and promising to return again she passed her small hand through the ponderous bars and succeeded in just touching the fingers of Mrs. Harford, who, being more substantially made than her visitor, was unable to follow her example.

They took a friendly leave of each other, and parted.

As Helen drove home she glanced at the narrative given her, and was disgusted at the amount of bigotry and nonsense it contained. It had been printed at Rome, and purported to be an account of Miss Harford's life and religious experience from infancy, even alleging that her heart first became impressed with doubts and anxieties at the early age of four years.

Helen marvelled at the weakness of the mother whose mind could be so utterly darkened as to credit such a history herself, and believe that others were capable of doing so.

That evening when Castelbianco entered the drawing-room before dinner, he was accompanied by Padre Calvi.

He addressed the Princess courteously, and in answer to her inquiries said he had arrived that afternoon from Rome, having returned some time earlier than he had expected. The conversation was interesting, as the

priest had much to relate, and had, moreover, the power and charm of uniting instruction with his flow of words. He had been some months absent from Naples, and Helen had not met him since the death of the old Princess; but Time, the Appeaser, had smoothed and softened down the angles where they were wont to rub against each other. She did her best to evince no remaining coldness of manner; and Padre Calvi accepted the will and responded to it amiably enough.

The Prince, for a wonder, asked Helen where she had been that day; but he was in a good humour for once, and at the propitious symptom, she proceeded to give him an account of her adventures.

Castelbianco knew nothing of the Harfords personally, and consequently was not much interested in their doings; but Padre Calvi was familiar with their history.

"Sister Agatha," he said, "promises to be a shining light in our Holy Church."

"True, indeed, judging by this pamphlet," answered the Princess, pointing to it as it lay on the table beside her. "Her mother told me the order is one of the strictest in being, and yet Sister Agatha, not content with this fact, is bent on hunting up various obsolete rules. I doubt whether she will recommend herself to the other nuns by such a course."

"They will gladly join her in so pious a work," was the quiet reply. "The rules are even now very severe, and the dress is oppressive at some seasons; but where 'the spirit indeed is willing,' such mortifications of the flesh are gladly adopted."

"What are the observances that Sister Agatha seeks to restore?"

"The Order of ——— derives its origin from the Pro-

phets Elijah and Elisha, and amongst some of the rules that are now relaxed, are those of confinement to the cells, where prayer was to be continued day and night; strict fastings; total abstinence from meat; and silence from vespers to tierce the following day."

Padre Calvi was now slowly turning over the leaves of the pamphlet, Helen watching his countenance the while; but she was no skilled physiognomist to pierce the thoughts of such a man. They were a book unreadable, and unread at all times.

"I wonder that Mrs. Harford should have allowed such trash to be published," she exclaimed at length.

Padre Calvi looked up inquiringly.

"Pray, Madame la Princesse, may I ask what you mean by *trash*?"

"It is stated in those pages, that Sister Agatha's conversion began when she was four years old."

"Well?"

"I am no believer in miracles, Padre Calvi, San Gennaro's included," was Helen's rather contemptuous reply.

"Yet you read of them in the Bible, which is a book that you Protestants profess to study."

"Nay, do not institute such a comparison! I am speaking of our own day,—those heavenly miracles have long ceased to occur."

"And how long have they ceased to be? I ask for the sake of information."

Helen looked surprised. The priest's cold eyes rested full upon her, and she fancied she could discern a shadow of contempt in their expression. This somewhat confused her, and she answered slowly: "Our Saviour wrought 'many mighty works,' and so did the Apostles."

"In still earlier times, the prophets and good men of old worked them in the Name of the Lord ; and Christian disciples performed miracles after the Apostles. You appear to know the exact date when such power ceased to be given to men ?"

Poor Helen felt that she could not argue with such an opponent, and to save herself, answered his question Scotch fashion, by asking another.

"Can you credit the story of an infant being converted at four years old ?" she inquired with an incredulous smile.

"Protestant sects are all strong on the subject of election, grace, the workings of the Holy Spirit, and other similar manifestations of Divine Power, and why may not This have been exhibited in the present instance ?"

"But, Padre Calvi," she persisted, "you forget the subject in this case was a child of four years, — *four years old!*" she repeated with increased emphasis.

"Excuse me, I do not forget the fact."

"And yet you believe her narrative ?"

"'With men this is impossible ; *but with God all things are possible,*'" was the slow, solemn answer.

And Helen was silenced, if not convinced.

CHAPTER XIX.

TIME rolled on, — months and days; slowly with some, too quickly with others: unnumbered, unheeded by the rich and prosperous, who, in their brief, delirious existence,

“ . . . take no note of time
But from its loss; ”

disregarded by the young and happy, who, in the light-heartedness springing from youth alone, have no regrets buried with the past, no fears for the future, and no care for the present beyond that of enjoyment, when the light of day, the soft summer nights, “the sweet breath of flowers,” the song of birds, nay, the simple fact of existence in a beautiful world, is sufficient of itself to produce happiness.

Time rolled on, — months and days. The mourner counts them sorrowfully, grudgingly, as each takes him farther away from departed joys; and he anticipates fearfully the coming dreary time when even the vividness of remembrance shall fade, and leave nought to fill the void.

The lonely heart sees them pass unmoved: they neither rob it of joys, nor confer any, until the final hour is come, and there is peace at last — a holy calm: the craving is satisfied.

“ The heart may live a lifetime in an hour,
And well embrace
A lifetime's energy and strength and power
Within that space.

We do it wrong, Time by one rule to reckon ;
 For by our state —
 As our stern fears deter, or fond hopes beckon —
 Should it bear date.

A minute's agony appears a day ;
 Years of delight
 Seem traced by memory, having passed away,
 Transient as light.

With Love, Time flies ; Hate makes it linger ;
 Says Youth, 'Be past !'
 Age, pointing to its sands with eager finger,
 Murmurs, 'Too fast !'

Time rolled on — months and days — and Castalbiano gambled more and more, and passed his nights at cards, betting and losing to his boon comrades, growing viler each hour, and more unworthy the true heart which had entrusted its life's treasure to his care. And by day he would vent his disappointment, and headaches, and losses on that delicate being, adding taunting words, and cutting sarcasm, and bitter anger at the reproach her religion was to him. And then he would regret the lost inheritance, tell her she was a burden and a weariness of the flesh to him, and grieve aloud at his mistake in having married a heretic, a wretched Protestant !

Time rolled on — and Helen's spirit sank beneath the load : her feet were sore and bleeding from treading "on the Alpine paths of life, against driving misery, and through stormy sorrows, over sharp afflictions ; walking with bare feet and naked breast, jaded, mangled, and chilled." *

She had no friends, no relations at hand to whom she could turn for comfort or advice. She could not break her fond mother's heart by telling her all the sad truth,

* Sydney Smith.

nor bring her old father's grey hairs with sorrow and self-reproach to the grave: self-reproach, for having yielded a reluctant consent to his child's wishes and prayers, instead of a resolute denial, distracting at the time, but merciful in the result. Poor old man! many sleepless nights had he passed since his visit to Naples — passed them in sadness and regret; for could he not see with the keensightedness of love that a grievous mistake had been made?—one that would still bear bitter fruits, bitterer perchance than had yet been tasted?

And Helen might not open all her griefs to a friend. Once she had done so, and the remembrance still clung to her with a feeling of shame: for had she not held up her husband to scorn — he whom she had sworn to cherish and honour? Would it not be said she was false to her vows, and had ceased to love him?

And was it so in very truth? He who believes as much knows nothing of woman's heart; how true and faithful it is, how patient, how forgiving!

Time rolled on — months and days — and Louisa, Contessa di Malafede, still waited for her husband's freedom or condemnation; still essayed to soften stony hearts by prayers and arguments, or to gain the ears of corrupt judges. She could no longer seek forgetfulness in the gay whirl of society, for to one who was under the ban, all immaculate doors were closed. "Was not her husband a suspected and disgraced man, and she herself a vain flirt and a coquette? Surely her vanity had had a fall, and was it not a just one?" And so the righteous ones of the earth bade her stand apart, nor defile their whitened garments with her polluted touch.

The Contessa had now full time for thought. Her cross was heavy to bear, but she bowed her head meekly,

and folding her hands upon her bosom said : " It is well, Lord ! "

She had been false to her God to gain the world's vanities, and what had it profited her ? She had scorned and neglected her husband, and now that he was taken away she found that he alone had been good to her, and kind. Her passionate heart had cried aloud for love which was denied her, and then nought else would satisfy it. Yet her choice had been made deliberately, consciously, and of her own free will. Yes, she had time to mourn over her haste, to repent her waste of opportunities, and to resolve to make a change if the means were vouchsafed her : and she sought it prayerfully.

Her baby was a blessing and a comfort to her. It awoke in her breast all the latent softness which had slumbered there so long undisturbed. She thanked Heaven day and night on her knees for the precious gift, and prayed for wisdom to instruct it, and skill to watch and guide its opening mind. And she thought how greatly her poor husband would rejoice in the growth and beauty of his fine boy, for he loved the child much. She even studied hard to fit herself to teach him : she would be his first mistress, and it should be her care to lay the good foundation ; then she would tell her plans, and hopes, and fears, to Helen, and ask her why she looked sad, and why she doubted her strength ? Would it not be given her from above ? Surely ; she doubted not at all.

Nevertheless the child's strange apathy continued and grew daily more apparent and more distressing ; but Louisa either did not remark it, or made believe she did not, so that Helen's heart quite ached with apprehension for her friend, and she vexed herself with

pondering whether she ought to rouse her suspicions, or let the truth appear when God willed it. It might be fancy on her part after all. Pepito was still very young, and some children were more backward than others, and she might only produce great misery by her precipitancy, which need never have been excited.

Then Helen's own baby fell ill of some common infantile disorder, and though the doctor, a Neapolitan, assured her there was no danger, still she feared terribly lest her darling should be taken away, leaving her all alone in her dreary home. And so she prayed much, and wept and watched, for she had no confidence in the native practitioners; she pleaded hard for an English one, but Castelbianco was obdurate.

"I have had quite enough to do with the English, *ti dico*, and won't let my child be killed by their physicians. *Sciocchezza!* you make as much fuss as if it were a boy instead of a useless girl. Never fear, she will live to require a *dot* at my hands." And Helen, almost wild at his brutality, returned to weep at her child's bedside.

Minette was a lovable little being, and bade fair to have all her mother's beauty in future days. She was a quick, precocious child, and began to chatter in a language of her own that sounded like the sweetest music in Helen's ears. Castelbianco was not unkind to her, but his mood was uncertain, and he was disappointed at not having a son, which at Naples is esteemed almost akin to a disgrace. Besides, he remembered incessantly that he had tacitly failed in his pledge to his wife and her family, and through his own act had deprived himself of the Priory as a rich inheritance. If it had even been settled on his little daughter, he might have managed it in trust for her, and got good pickings

for himself to lay by against a rainy day. He quite ignored the fact of Mr. Mowbray being a strong, healthy man, and more likely to attain a good old age than he with his battered frame.

Thus poor little Minette (a pet name given her by the mother) became an eyesore to her father, and a subject of self-reproach,—not for conscience, but for vanity's sake,—at having outwitted himself; and he, usually so long-sighted and keen after his own interests; he who gloried in being numbered with

“Calm, thinking villains, whom no faith can fix,
Of crooked counsels and dark politics.”

It was when her child was fast recovering, and Helen's mind was again at ease, that a little incident occurred characteristic of Naples and her nobility.

Some French acquaintances, strangers in the place, were desirous to see the royal palaces. Castelbianco, who, reserving his ill-temper for *home*,—after a fashion that is by no means uncommon in every country and age,—could make himself appear the most charming of mortals in society, procured the necessary permissions, and, moreover, volunteered his services as guide.

The offer was gladly accepted, and Helen was earnestly entreated to join the party. As little Maria was now doing so well, she consented, anxious, poor soul, to creep into her husband's good graces by favouring his friends. But, for aught he cared about her, she might have staid quietly at home. It would almost seem that he found pleasure in plaguing her, that he did so for the mere *diversion* of the thing, because, though he valued her so little, he now thought it right to be jealous of her by fits and starts, and used expressions that often cut her to the quick. Sometimes she wept

sore at these, and then he would bid her dry her eyes, and not be puling and muling like a baby: at others the rebellious blood flushed her cheeks, and fire sparkled in her fine eyes, and then he would call her a virago, and ask if she were not ashamed of showing such a bad temper.

And so Helen's sweet natural manners grew uncertain and constrained, and people found her altered and cold, while she was trembling lest her husband should complain of her too free demeanour towards his male acquaintance, or scold her for being uncourteous and stiff.

The Castelbiancos and their friends had traversed all the apartments of the royal palace of —, and the French members of the party had been greatly entertained at sight of some marble statues, which had been decently covered, not even the presence of the Neapolitans availing to restrain their merriment and wit. But the prince was worldly enough to laugh also, though less openly, for spies might be at hand to note such treason.

Descending the marble staircase, he entered the porter's lodge for a moment to crave a light for his cigar. The official gave it willingly, but watched the Prince, who, unconscious of the scrutiny he was undergoing, was busy coaxing the cigar to ignite. Succeeding at last, he looked up to acknowledge the favour, and his eyes encountered those of the man, whose features immediately appeared familiar to him.

The porter took off his hat, smiled, and seeing that he was not recognised, said:

"Signor Principe, you don't remember me?"

"I know your face, but I cannot tell where I have seen you before; yet——"

"Ah! *giusto*, you begin to recollect."

"Non è possibile, — ma pure, Mercurio?"

"Ah! sì, per mia disgrazia!"

"But how came you to be so reduced? you, a man of good family, to be a porter!"

"Che volete, Signor Principe? In this life we all have our ups and downs; when last we met, you, mi ricordo bene, stavate nei *bassi profondi*, ed ora tocc' a me!"

"*Ma, amico mio*, did not your father the Baron leave any property? He was well off, and you used even to lend me money."

"Yes, and if you will repay me some of it now, I shall be obliged, for evidently the world wags merrily with you."

"Sì, sì, *se ne parlerà poi*; but give an account of yourself first. Your father ——"

"*La buon' anima di papà* died some twelve years ago, leaving *mammà* and the girls to my care. Being head of the family, I looked about for a rich wife and good connection, and fixed upon little Francesca — you remember her? — *che bella ragazza era una vera delizia!*"

"Gaetano," said Helen, interrupting the speaker's rhapsody, and greatly astonished at discovering her husband in such close and intimate conversation with a *porter*, even though he were a royal functionary, "Gaetano, your friends have been waiting for you a long time; are you coming?"

"Subito, subito! Yet, no — make some excuse for me, and don't wait. I can't come now. *E senti*, Elena, this *gentleman* is the Baron Mercurio; let me introduce him."

Helen absolutely stared as the porter made her a low and courtly bow! However, she acknowledged it with

her customary politeness, glancing incredulously afterwards at her husband.

"*Non ci crede niente*," he said, laughing. "*Va, figlia mia*, I'll tell you all about it, *uno di questi giorni*;" and then, as she went away marvelling, he seated himself, and renewed the confab with his strange acquaintance.

"*Andiamo avanti*," he cried, directly they were alone; "what about that *bella ragazza Chechina*?"

"Ah! Signori miei," returned his new companion with a heavy sigh, "she is now *la Marchesa di St. —*"

"She wouldn't have you, then?"

"*Oh che sà*; but my *disgrazia* took place, and then her parents interfered. I am married now, and have three children, and Carmela is a good woman enough, — *ma, ma —*"

"You would have preferred something *più saporita*; eh, amico mio?"

"*Forse*; but I am very comfortable, with few expenses, and neither horses, drags, nor companions to clear me out—only children. *Ma Santa Pazienza*, how they do eat! Have you any *bamboli*, Signor Principe?"

"One, a girl: but never mind about the children, they are bother enough as it is; tell us about yourself."

"Appunto. Well, my father died, *come vi stava dicendo*, and six months after I was arranging a matrimonial engagement with Chechina. Just at the most inconvenient moment, and in the thick of the settlements, a notice was presented to me from a distant relative claiming both my title and property. *Figuratevi*! I absolutely laughed. *Ma, santi numi! ci fù poco da ridere*. My marriage was postponed *sine die*, and the settlements were interrupted; how could I make any when my right of possession was questioned?"

"But how could it be questioned when you were the eldest son?" asked Castelbianco in astonishment.

"Aspettate un momento. My father's *grandfather* derived the title from the female line, and this thirtieth cousin pretended to have a prior claim to the property. Vedete un po'! *Ebbene*, I had to wait for my bride, and suffer the lawyers to fight out the question among themselves. *Per me non ci ho mai capito nulla*, but the *birbante* made out his case to the satisfaction of the law—*cioè*, he bribed higher than I could afford to do—and thus, by the crooked ways of this earth, he gained the *eredità*, leaving me nothing but an empty title!"

"Oh! per Bacco! That was too bad!" exclaimed the Prince with rising indignation.

"Ah! Immaginatevi."

"*Ma, Mercurio mio*, if you retained the title, why not the property?"

"Because the former was strictly entailed and not the latter. My great-grandfather was not a favourite with Madame Mère, who consequently made two wills. By the first, leaving both title and property to her son, and by the second, in a fit of anger, making over the latter to a favourite nephew. She died shortly after. The said nephew had enlisted in the French army and become naturalised as a Frenchman, and so gave no inkling of his whereabouts. After the first revolution, his son turned up, and came to Naples, where he settled and married, but nobody dreamt about the second will, till this young *birbone*—*his* child—again raked up the affair. How he found it out or got hold of the papers, is a perfect mystery, and I believe the whole thing was a forgery, from beginning to end."

"Chi sa!"

"You see the villain was richer than I, and therefore could bribe better, and now he has got everything but my barren honours! Chechina's parents would not let me have her, and I was nearly starving. I knew not what to do. I was too old to enter any of the professions; and having never studied sufficiently, nor been brought up with any such prospects, I did not know how to set to work; besides, I could not have undertaken any employment, *a rompermi la testa*. You know, Signor Principe, *che noi altri nobili* never do anything harder than ride, drive, walk in Toledo, or play cards and billiards. Imagine, therefore, my despair! *E poi, per dirvi la verità*, I couldn't stomach such a disgrace — *no cospetto*! I was poor and ruined, but I was not going to take rank with the *avvocati*, and that *razza di gente*!"

"Avete ragione! Better starve at once!" and Castebianco curled his moustachioed lip with an air of the most ineffable contempt.

"Ah! Signor Principe, so you say; but starving is no joke, I can tell you, and I was very near it at that time. That *poveraccio il Duca di Nastro*,—you recollect him?"

"Oh, yes! The little animal used to laugh at my ill luck, and lord it over me, as if *he* had only to wish and have. He was driven to go on some railway, *mi sembra*?"

Si, Signore; he certainly had some luck attending him, while I have always been under the evil influence of the *malocchio*; poor devil, that I am."

"But your family, your mother, and sisters, where are they?" asked Castebianco, after a short pause.

"They had a little money which could not be touched; so that one sister married a *galantuomo* from the pro-

vinces, who was tolerably well off, and we were glad enough to provide for her, you may believe. She is living in Puglia. I have never seen her since. My other sister was ugly, and her marriage portion not being large enough to induce a man to overlook this misfortune, we placed her in a respectable convent, though not one equal to her birth; we could not afford that. However, both my sisters were thus settled, and I was comparatively free, because *mammà*, who is a good soul, said I was not to bother my brains about her, as she had enough to keep herself in macaroni. Ah! she is a *buona donna*!" and the ex-noble heaved a sigh.

"*Amico mio*!" exclaimed the Prince, who had no taste for sentiment, "*il tempo scorre; tiriamo avanti*!"

"*Ha ragione. Ebbene*, it was then I sought out Nastro, as I was about to tell you before, only you interrupted me, and turned the current of my ideas."

Castelbianco made a movement of impatience, which the other heeded not.

"Nastro had secured a snug berth on the line, at twelve ducats a month*, and so I went to ask his advice, how I might get the like; but, will you believe it? the pitiful wretch pretended not to know me! *Parola*!" he continued, seeing the Prince look astonished, "I mentioned my name, reminded him of the many merry-makings we had enjoyed together, and told him what I had come to him for. But he only said

* The writer was actually acquainted with a Neapolitan nobleman, the head of a house, boasting of three dukedoms and a countship, who took a clerkship on the railway, at twelve ducats a month. Also with a baron, who acted porter at one of the royal palaces. A prince belonging to one of the oldest families in Naples, kept a lamp shop in the Strada di Chiaja, where he was wont to serve his customers himself! Yet it was considered a degradation for a noble to enter one of the learned professions.

'he had *once* known a Barone Mercurio, who had since gone to the dogs, and I might be him, or I might not; how could he tell? I didn't look much like a Barone.' I flew in such a rage, that I gave him a blow in the face, which made his nose bleed, and then he shouted *Assassini!* at the top of his voice, and got all the railway officials and a crowd round us in a trice. Then came the police, and the wretch told them I was a robber, a murderer, and a lot of other lies; whereupon I gave my name and title, and called the fellow a liar. As the *gens d'armes* could not make out the rights of the case, we were both hurried off to the Polizia. There Nastro told his story, and I mine, and after being shut up for two days, we were turned out into the streets, and ordered, as we valued our liberty, to keep ourselves quiet."

There was a pause, the porter seemed lost in a reverie, while Castalbiano busied himself in lighting another cigar. This done, he settled himself to enjoy it, and seeing that his companion was likely to forget his presence, he brought the same to his recollection.

"Orsù, spicciamoci, che si fa notte!"

The other gave a start, passed his hand over his eyes, from which a strong light gleamed for an instant, and then continued in the same unruffled tones as before.

"Those were ugly times, Signor Principe, and I would rather not recall them. After some long months, I hardly know how many, I by chance heard of a vacancy as porter in this Royal Palace, and as beggars must not be choosers, I went to the Cav. —, whom I had known in better days, told him my story, and asked him to use his influence to procure me the situation. He was very kind, and did not pretend to forget me, like

that other villain, but got me this place, which I have held ever since. I have a roof over my head, and very little to do, as his Royal Highness is out of the country; the *mesata* is very small, *ma che volete*, a man can't have everything in this world! In course of time I married a *figliuola*, who brought me some little money besides, and has since presented me with three children. *E così siamo felici e contenti*, as storytellers always say in conclusion: *grazie alla Madonna!*"

"'Tis a strange history!" said the Prince. The other shrugged his shoulders without speaking. "But what became of the little Duca di Nastro after that business of the Polizia?"

"Che so io! I have a bad memory; besides, I don't trouble my head about such vermin! And how about that little sum of money, Sig. Principe?"

"Aspettate! Did he not die? I think I now recollect hearing that he was found murdered in the streets; stabbed, eh?"

"Possibile."

"Who did it?" And the Prince fixed his eyes full on his companion.

The porter did not answer the question, but returned the stare unabashed. Then a fleeting sardonic smile showed itself on the countenance of each, and vanished.

"*Ora pro nobis!*" said Castelbianco, seriously, as he rose, threw the end of his cigar out of the window, and stretched himself, "You hav'n't a bad room here, at all events. I shall come and see you again to talk over old times, and then I shall beg to be presented to the Signora Baronessa; till when, *a rivederci, amico.*"

"But the money, Signor Principe?"

"Via, come siete seccante! Just now you told me you had a bad memory when I inquired after a mutual

acquaintance; but you remember marvellously well a small matter of money! *Amico, lasciamolo stare*; old friends like us understand each other." And with a careless farewell nod, the noble Principe di Castelbianco went on his way, deaf to a half audible curse, which escaped his companion the ex-Baron.

CHAPTER XX.

A GLIMMER of light reached the Contessa at last. One day she was visited by the young lawyer who had boldly undertaken the dangerous office of defending the Conte di Malafede, supposing he should be brought to trial, an event which by no means necessarily followed imprisonment at Naples.

Many were the unfortunates who during the *reign of terror* in the latter days of Ferdinand II. were suddenly seized by the ruthless myrmidons of the *law* (frightful perversion of the word), and committed to dungeons, such as Englishmen familiar with the system prevalent in this happy land, can neither realise nor imagine.

Oftentimes men whom the whisper of a secret enemy, or the envy of pretended friends, sufficed to place under the ban of suspicion, were laid violent hands on in the open streets, and taken none knew whither; or, while resting in the quiet of their homes, after the day's hard toil and industry, were suddenly summoned to depart with the savage *sbirri*, who startled them from their deceitful calm. It was vain then to protest innocence, or plead for mercy; vain to ask the nature of the offence, or the name of the accuser; vain to hope that the tears of despairing wives and mothers, sisters and children, might soften hearts harder than nether millstones — immoveable as rocks!

Torn from their families; accused of no specific crime; without counsel to defend them, because few men had courage or self-denial enough to undertake such a thankless office while near and dear ones depended on their exertions for support; with little prospect of a trial, and the assurance that if granted the process would be but a wicked mockery, when both accusation and sentence were pre-arranged and predetermined; denied the small satisfaction of confronting the unknown foe, and proving the falsehood of his tale—such was the lot of many a guiltless man! And ah! if *this* had been all.

Who shall picture the hopeless months of imprisonment that followed? The torture-rack applied to frames enfeebled by sickness, starvation, and confinement; the slower, but equally certain torture of dirt, disease, and bitter mortifications, humbling to a gentleman,—nay to a *man's* sense of honour, self-respect, and decency. Chained, perhaps, night and day to a common felon, with no relief, no rest; breathing air so impure and distressing, that even the brutalised jailers found it difficult to bear during an occasional brief visit to their unhappy victims; shut out from the light of day, from the blessings of sunshine and fresh air allotted to the meanest of God's creatures!

Such was the portion of hundreds of our fellow-Christians, men and brethren! Who does not know the sad tale? who has not trembled and shuddered at its bare recital? but who among us can *realise the actual endurance* of such horrors?

"Signora Contessa," said Don Ernesto, the lawyer, "I come to inform you that within a few days a batch of political prisoners will be brought to trial, and it is just possible that the Signor Conte may be among them."

"Oh! Don Ernesto, do you know this for certain?"

"Cara Signora, who can know anything for certain in this unfortunate country? It is whispered that the Signor Conte will be among the accused, and at any rate your long and painful suspense will be ended."

Louisa turned deadly pale for an instant, but recovering herself, she said, with a sickly smile, "Don Ernesto, we know not what may follow; worse most likely than I have yet gone through, because over your Courts of *Justice* are inscribed the words

"'Per me si va nella città dolente:
Per me si va nell' eterno dolore:
Per me si va tra la perduta gente!'"

The lawyer was gentle by nature; his profession brought him in contact with scenes of misery and woe, and he was not hardened to them as yet. He felt for the poor woman before him, and offered some words of comfort,— words, of course, for did not his reason reject them?

After a short pause, he spoke again.

"We must do our best in the meantime to gain the ear of the judges. I have brought you the names of three whom you had better visit to-day, and—excuse the seeming freedom of the remark, it is not meant impertinently—with your winning manners, you may obtain some influence over them. But—but ——"

"But what, Don Ernesto?"

"Signora Contessa, you have had many calls upon your purse lately; can you afford any more?"

"Is it necessary?"

"It is indeed: soft words require solid arguments to back them."

Louisa put her hand to her brow as if she would fain

remove some dull weight that oppressed her there; then she slowly left the room. She soon returned, and putting a case into the lawyer's hands, said,

"These diamonds are my own, if you will raise money on them, I shall be obliged, for I do not know how to set about it."

"*Sarà servita*; in an hour I will return and bring you as much as I can obtain."

He departed, and Louisa sat down by the open window to await his coming, for she could do nothing without the money. Her brain felt deadened and confused, incapable of plans for the future or arrangements for the present emergency. She feared that she was becoming almost an automaton, obedient to the lawyer's dictation, but powerless to *think* for herself.

It was spring time again, and as she seated herself near the balcony to relieve her heated brow by the cool air, she remembered drearily the day she had sat there two years previously, when she was a bride with bright prospects before her. Yet she was sad enough then dwelling on the past, and grieving for its loss. But now life was become real, and the burden of another's sorrows was laid upon her to endure besides her own. Then she could "only stand and wait," now the necessity of exertion was healthful to her, though as yet she could not see and acknowledge it. But

" . . . God by ways they have not known,
Will lead His own."

The lawyer returned punctually to his time, and brought with him a handsome sum of money, which the diamonds (a gift of Louisa's city uncle) had fetched.

"I have another plan to propose to you, Signora Contessa, which I forgot to mention at my first visit.

It is well in such an emergency to try every means in our power, wherefore I have drawn up a petition to Sua Maestà, for you to sign, if you think fit."

He presented it to her for perusal: it was a humble *supplica* for mercy and pardon from the King's faithful subject Luigi Conte di Malafede.

Louisa flushed, as her pride rose in rebellion.

"Why beg for pardon when my husband is an innocent man?" she asked somewhat haughtily.

"Ha ragione! But what is to be done? We neither know where this *galantuomo* is incarcerated, the charge that is brought against him, nor the name of his accuser — though it is possible to guess the latter in a manner —"

"Who is it?" — she looked up quickly.

The lawyer hesitated an instant, then:

"Has the Signor Conte ever offended *un certo Barone* —" He stopped, went to the doors, assured himself there were no listeners, and again returning to the Contessa's side whispered cautiously,

"Un certo Barone Torlone?"

Louisa turned scarlet, and the lawyer, who was quick-witted, was satisfied of the truth of his suspicions.

"We are not acquainted with that——" she hesitated, "that man——" here her voice slightly shook.

Don Ernesto averted his gaze. Though not admitted within the charmed circle of the Neapolitan *élite*, except on matters of business, he and his associates were quite *au courant* with the town gossip, and during the previous winter idle tongues had made scandalous food for themselves with the names of the Contessa di Malafede and the Barone Torlone.

"I feared the Signor Conte might have offended this man somehow, with every reason on his side, doubtless,

because, *tra noi*, the Barone belongs to a *brutta razza*! And this would not be the first time that he had secured his own immunity from evil by bringing others within the clutches of the law!"

Louisa trembled a good deal, but said nothing.

"Therefore believe me, cara Signora, however distasteful to your just sense of what is due to your poor husband, it will be better to present this petition to the King himself, who often does not know all that these base underlings work in his name."

"And how am I to get it placed in his Majesty's hands?"

"To-day is the festa di San Gennaro, and to-morrow morning their Majesties will proceed to the cathedral to adore the miracle,"—here Don Ernesto's lip slightly curled. "As Sua Maestà enters the Duomo, you will have an excellent opportunity of presenting the petition; I will accompany you, if you will permit me?"

"Grazie, Don Ernesto, you are kind; let it be as you say. I shall be ready at the hour you may appoint, and now I will seek the judges."

All that morning the Contessa, to use an expressive Italianism, *face anticamera* at the residences of the arbiters of her husband's fate.

She had to conciliate the servants first to gain admission to the great men, and when *in the presence* she repeated her case for the hundredth time, and begged for justice.

Judges, whether attired in wigs and robes, or undistinguished from the common herd by such awful emblems of their dignity, are only men after all; and the little heart those specimens of the genus owned was vainly somewhat touched at the sight of a fair woman's tears. They were each and all full of hopes

and assurances, and entreated the Signora Contessa not to distress herself, as all might yet be well. And so the poor thing's spirits were somewhat raised, and she did not grudge the cost of this little bit of cordial.

When the lady departed, each complaisant administrator of the law found a long, round, sealed packet beside his desk. He knew not how it came there, nor did he question his secretary or deferential attendants on the subject, but accepted the good things of this world in a grateful spirit. In our country justice is supposed to be blindfold, but in Southern Italy she sees sufficiently to be able to unlock an *escritoire*, and secure therein whatever needs a place of safety.

Oh! ye conscientious men of England, judges, and lords, and barons, be not hasty to blame those who only seek to improve a pitiful salary averaging from four to five pounds a month!

On the following day Don Ernesto sought the Contessa early, and the two started on their mission to the Duomo.

They found, however, that the King had already entered it, and mass was proceeding when they arrived. The lawyer, in spite of his doubts respecting the miracle, joined in the service devoutly, and Louisa, who was regarded as a true Catholic, also knelt and prayed, as those only who are in the deep waters of affliction do pray. It was still a temple dedicated to the Lord, though not her temple, and she could pour out her whole heart, and seek for mercy and support where it is never sought in vain! She heeded not the actual service, but knelt on the cold dirty marble pavement with her face buried in her hands, lost to all that was passing around.

At length she felt a touch on her arm and started.

"Signora Contessa andiamo, è tempo!"

She rose, and for an instant shook like an aspen leaf.

Don Ernesto seeing her sudden tremor, offered his arm, which she took gratefully, and with the other he battled with the throng and fought a passage through the dense masses.

"Buona gente, abbiate pazienza! — Un po' di spazio, per carità. Si tratta d'una supplica al Rè nostro Signore!"

And so the good-natured people hushed their rising murmurs and strove to make way, and gazed at the poor lady with compassion. "Poveretta. La Madonna Santissima l'ajuti!" "San Gennaro la possa benedicere!" She thanked them all in her heart, and the women especially, with her sorrowing, grateful eyes.

They reached the entrance, and Don Ernesto stationed his charge in a front position. The Contessa felt sick and faint, and the crowd seemed to sway and whirl round before her eyes; she covered them with her hand to gain a moment's relief, and then she felt herself pushed aside and hustled, and looking up frightened, beheld the police and soldiers closing in a pathway, and she herself losing all chance of the desired opportunity.

"Oh! per carità, buoni signori, let me advance!" and she held up the white paper in sign of her mission. "*Impossibile! non è permesso*" were the gruff answers she received.

The King drew nearer: some *gardes du corps* cleared the way, but she saw Count Giulio among their number. Forcing herself between the *sbirri*, who attempted to push her roughly back, she attracted the Count's attention. He was beside her in an instant, and a few words freed her from her persecutors.

"Madame la Comtesse, what is it you want? I am distressed to see you thus! Can I serve you?"

"The King — the King!" it was all she could say, for her lips and mouth were dry and parched.

The good-natured young man presented his arm, and stood supporting her in the open space. The Queen passed on, first bowing her acknowledgments right and left, but the Contessa felt that her own low reverence was disregarded. Ferdinand II., tall, with head erect, and clad in military uniform, lingered a step behind to allow the Queen to enter the state carriage.

"Allez, maintenant, et que le bon Dieu vous aide!" and Count Giulio slightly pushed her in advance. Starting forward, Louisa fell at the King's feet. "Maestà! faccia grazia al Conte di Malafede — per l'amor di Dio!"

And she held up the paper with tremulous hands.

Ferdinand frowned — frowns were almost natural to those heavy brows — but he took the paper, and being a *gentleman* as well as a King, he raised the kneeling lady, saying as she kissed the hand he held out,

"Signora Contessa, ci penserò."

The royal cortège had driven away, the crowd was nearly dispersed, but the Contessa still wept hysterically in the humble chemist's shop, whither the kindly lawyer and Count Giulio had conveyed her half fainting. Neither left her till they saw her safe home.

CHAPTER XXI.

"You have heard nothing further, then?" asked Helen of her friend.

"Nothing; the trials are to commence to-morrow, and perhaps I may have a chance of seeing poor Luigi if I can get into the courts! Yet I dread the meeting, he will be so changed!"

The two ladies were walking together in one of the shady avenues of the Villa Reale, where little Pepito went every morning with his nurse, and was often accompanied by his mother. At that early hour there were no fashionables in the gardens, and the poor lady could enjoy a peaceful ramble without fear of interruption; safe from chilly bows or decided cuts, from anxious inquiries, ill-concealing idle curiosity, or from more open and impertinent inquisitiveness.

Helen had sought her at her own residence, but hearing whither the Contessa had gone, she betook herself there also, glad to spend the fresh spring morning in the open air.

The trees were clothed in their bright green leaves, bringing out the Majenta-coloured blossoms of the Judas and the snowy clusters of the acacias in striking contrast. The white temples were wreathed gracefully with the purple *Bougainvillia*, and delicate lilac *Westeria*, while numerous American shrubs formed an effective background to the brilliancy of the rest. The

gardeners were employed at their never-ending labours on the grass plots, cutting and clipping handfuls of the rank overgrown weed with small scissors, and stopping every five minutes to chat idly together. The sentries pursued their wearisome walk, in their small allotted space, often, however, enjoying a gossip with their friends, or begging cigars from passers by.

The two friends proceeded to the pleasant Bastion, and seated on one of the marble benches, watched the blue rippling waves as they broke softly, musically against the shore. A light haze rested on Capri and the Sorrento coast, promising a hot day; a feathery crown, palm-shaped, hung over Vesuvius, while scarce a cloud floated in the clear expanse of sky. Along the beach the fishermen were hauling in their nets, or busily preparing for a fresh start, and their picturesque sails covered the calm waters, waiting for the noonday breeze, to speed them on their way.

The ladies were quickly spied by one of those persecuting vendors of shells and *sea-horses*, who, clinging to the outside of the rails, besiege all that seek a little rest on the benches of the Bastion.

To free themselves from this torment, Louisa expended a few *grani*, and sent the lad away rejoicing. She then endeavoured to amuse Pepito with the toys, but they did not interest him, and Helen could see that his apathy pained the mother.

"Oh Helen! is the child only backward for his age, or ill? Yet he looks healthy enough. Dear Minette is so different, so full of life, and play, and chatter!" and Louisa's eyes filled with tears, as she returned the boy, almost impatiently, to his nurse's arms.

As she did so, he made one of those harsh, unnatural noises which were so distressing to hear, and then

broke into a fit of passion at being thus separated from his mother.

"Is it not dreadful both to hear and see such evidences of temper in so young a child? Take him away, nurse, he has been too much indulged, and I am resolved not to yield to his naughtiness in future!"

"Have you obtained any medical opinion about him, Louisa?" asked Helen, after a short pause, and then speaking with a slight hesitation.

"No; why do you ask? The boy is quite well; only look at his rosy cheeks!"

"True; but—but I hardly think the apathy he sometimes evinces is quite natural."

"What do you mean, Helen?" but the tones were sharpened by anxiety, and the Princess felt that the subject was not new to her friend's thoughts.

"Nay," she answered, trying to smile, "I scarce know what I mean, for Pepito looks blooming enough; yet I think he might take more interest in his toys, and begin to chatter baby language. Perhaps he is tongue-tied; do you know? It is a very simple affair, if that is what deprives us of the pleasure of his *conversation*!"

"No, he is not tongue-tied!" the Contessa answered, almost with difficulty. "That was seen to when he was an infant."

There was another silence, while Helen was hunting about for a less anxious topic to talk on, but Louisa spoke again.

"Who is considered a good surgeon here, Helen?"

"I hardly know—I have heard Dr. di R—— well spoken of."

"I will take Pepito to him now; it is early, and the sooner this suspense is over the better."

Helen looked at the Contessa, as rising from her seat,

she beckoned the nurse to approach. She was very white, her lips were firmly closed, and her whole aspect denoted a person who nerves herself to go through some fiery trial.

Helen's kind heart bled for that poor mother.

"Shall I go with you?"

"Will you?"—eagerly. "God bless you, dearest, for a true friend."

They entered Helen's carriage which was waiting at one of the gates, and started on their mission. They had to traverse a great part of the town, and enter the dark, narrow streets of the old quarter, ere they reached their destination. There they learned that the doctor was *fuor di casa*, but expected back shortly.

"Then we will wait for him," said Louisa; "*waiting* is my hourly occupation now," she added bitterly.

" 'They also serve who only stand and wait!'"

answered Helen, gently.

A silent pressure of the hand was the answer she received. They ascended the dingy, wretched staircase till they reached the doctor's apartment, where a man-servant received them. He bade them enter and sit down, and then they *waited*.

Do not we all know what that means?

Who has not *waited* in the crowded dining-room of a fashionable dentist? A few strong-minded females work desperately at knitting, or knotting, to divert their attention, and so turn those wasted minutes to account. Others who come in parties carry on earnest conversations in whispers, which apparently engross all their thoughts. Some of the men con over the few old journals or papers that strew the table; some have even resolution enough to write notes or letters, but others —

and on the whole they are the most numerous of either sex — sit with folded hands, their eyes gazing at vacancy, heeding only, and with a slight start, the frequent opening of the door when a stately butler ushers in fresh victims, or summons forth the doomed to slaughter!

Who does not sympathise with the weary waiting of the sick and poor at a doctor's house or at a hospital? Faces, pale and worn with long suffering, are there; poor maimed wretches writhing with pain; children moaning piteously on their mothers' knees; and shadowy forms wasting surely away, wearied out and faint by the long *waiting* in a cold room, and perchance the day's journey from the country!

Who has not *waited* for the sentence either for life or death — at a consultation? How the strained attention watches for the opening of the library door, and the heart aches with a dull, heavy pain at every fresh disappointment! How long a time the three physicians take to come to a decision! Is the case then so intricate, so hopeless? And perhaps while the anxious one is thus waiting till fear and dread become almost unsupportable, those three arbiters of his fate are pleasantly chatting over some news of the day — a good leader in the "*Times*," an exciting case of mysterious poisoning — or what not! Yet were it otherwise, life to these wise and good men — a life passed amid death scenes and misery — would prove a burden too hard for them to bear!

At length a quick ring at the bell startled them. What a trifle will sometimes make the heart beat! Dr. di R — entered. He was a tall man of ponderous make, with a natural or assumed stoop of the shoulders, as he generally walked at a solemn pace with his hands behind his back and eyes seeking the ground, his mind apparently deep in some studious reverie. He was

followed by a spruce young gentleman who acted as secretary and *prescription writer*.

When the great man got close to his visitors, he raised his eyes inquiringly to theirs, but ere they could speak he begged them to excuse him for a few minutes, as he had to write out some paper of consequence. They acquiesced sadly, and sat down again with a sigh to wait a little longer.

The secretary placed himself at a writing-table in an adjoining room, and the doctor standing beside him began to dictate. The door was open and the Contessa watched these proceedings with despairing gaze, but at last the writing ended, the matter was read over and approved after a brief reverie, and *then* Dr. di R—— requested the ladies to enter his private study, and inform him how he could serve them.

The Contessa began to explain, or tried to do so, but soon her lip quivered, and she signed to Helen to relieve her of the task.

Poor Helen! it was an arduous and delicate one, but she undertook it bravely, and to spare her friend made very scant allusion to any fears of impending calamity, only expressing their mutual desire for some explanation of the child's apathy.

Dr. di R——, unlike most Neapolitans, was a man of few words, and so, without making any answer to the Princess, he proceeded to examine Pepito, who was sitting quietly on his nurse's knees, with his large eyes fixed on Louisa, but taking very little notice of anything else.

After a few minutes the doctor said,

"The child appears to be quite healthy. He watches the Signora Contessa much; is he fond of her?"

"Very," was the reply coming straight from the

mother's heart, and as Louisa's eyes smiled on her boy, his brightened visibly.

Another pause. Dr. di R—— was apparently wasting his precious moments, for he was only addressing the boy, and trying to attract his attention, in which he signally failed.

“Signora Contessa, place yourself behind the child, if you please—this side—and talk to him : bid him look at you.”

She did as she was desired, but now that she was out of his sight, Pepito took no further notice of her. Louisa felt almost vexed; she had declared the child was much attached to her, yet now she called to him in vain, and exhausted every term of persuasive endearment. Just then, without warning, the doctor, who was again deep in his reveries, struck a gong loudly which was placed on a table close at hand. They all started in terror, for their nerves were sadly unstrung. The doctor perceiving their alarm, apologised for not having prepared them, adding, that it was intended as a signal to a servant in another room. He then addressed a few words to the secretary, who was a silent spectator of the scene, and afterwards inquired if the child could speak yet?

As the Contessa remained silent, Helen answered for her in the negative.

Dr. di R—— then approached Pepito, who had remained tranquilly in his nurse's arms, quite unscared by the noise which had made her almost scream. Either he did not admire the doctor's personal attractions, or felt himself roughly handled, but when his mouth was opened and a close inspection of that and the throat ensued, he flew into one of his sudden fits of passion and became nearly unmanageable, uttering the most distressing sounds, which struck like daggers into Louisa's heart.

Dr. di R—— looked at last as if he had come to a decision. The Contessa could not remove her eyes from his countenance, but as he did not speak, she turned to Helen, almost gasping.

“Ask him.”

“What is your opinion, Signor Dottore?” Helen inquired, with a shiver.

“Vuol sapere la verità?” to the mother.

She nodded.

“È sordo e muto.”

She did not speak, or shriek, or petition for mercy, but stood like a petrified figure, with eyes staring wildly at the cruel man, eyes almost starting from their sockets in their horror and despair! She was appalling to gaze on, and the sight seemed to curdle one's blood. The nurse uttered loud cries and lamentations, Helen was weeping softly, piteously twining her loving arms round her friend, and whispering holy words of courage and resignation, kissing her hands and face, and imploring her to speak and look at her. Yet the statue spoke not, moved not, only stared in dismay at the dread oracle.

The secretary turned away with a shudder, while Dr. di R——, with a gentle “*poveretta*,” poured out a cordial into a glass, and almost forced it down the wretched woman's throat. It roused her a little, and then they made her sit down, when the physician, true to his Neapolitan practice, proceeded to bleed her. They bathed her forehead with vinegar, removed her bonnet, opened the windows, which, however, giving on a dirty narrow lane, admitted no refreshing air. At last the physician dictated a *calmante* to the secretary, and bade Helen administer it to the Contessa on her reaching home, promising to call himself later in the day, to

see her. They got her down stairs at last, and into the carriage, and she let them do with her what they pleased, but neither spoke nor wept; Helen would have been thankful to see her despair find such a vent.

On reaching her residence, she descended unaided from the carriage, and mounted the staircase without a word to her companions. She went mechanically to her own room, where she sat down on the nearest chair with an air of helpless, hopeless misery that was pitiable to behold, and suffered them to remove her shawl and bonnet. Then she remained with her hands lying listlessly on her lap, gazing out vacantly at the far-away horizon, and over the bright, sun-spangled sea, which danced and glittered as if the world were all beauty and peace, and there were no such sad realities in existence as sin and sorrow. Helen signed to the maid to leave them, and then kneeling beside her poor friend, she took one of those motionless hands tenderly in hers.

"Will you not speak a word to me, Louisa? I cannot bear to see you thus, without the power to comfort you." And she kissed the hands she pressed, while her tears flowed fast. Louisa's eyes were dry and burning, with no healing moisture to soften their desponding expression. "You know, dearest, that Dr. di R—— is only a Neapolitan physician, whose opinion may be wrong, we will consult another. Good English advice can be had here, only do not despair."

Louisa's lips trembled as she spoke for the first time.

"He spoke the truth. I feel it. There is no hope!"

"Nay, not so! while there is life there is hope. God is good."

"He has forsaken me. I can hope for nothing from Him. But my punishment is too great."

"Oh Louisa! He never forsakes the broken and contrite spirit; let us pray together for help and strength."

"I cannot pray, Helen. Leave me; I am no fit companion for you. Am I not deserted by God and man?" and she drew away her hand and turned partly from her.

"Why should I leave you? How can I do so at such a time? You know that I love you dearly, that I would comfort you if I could, and bid you trust in God's mercy, and pray, and hope."

"He will not answer my prayers, nor make 'the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak;'" she shuddered visibly at the words *deaf* and *dumb*.

"He will, — He will! in His own time and way. He can awaken the child's intelligence, and supply its sore needs by other means which now we cannot see; and He can soften your heart, Louisa, and give you patience and resignation to do His bidding; oh! 'it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'"

"Neither do I; but what would you have? Can I rejoice in the lines that have fallen to me?"

"They are sad, very sad; yet — they may be for good."

"Good to have a helpless idiot tied to me for life! — a burden and a reproach!"

"Oh! not a reproach, and remember it is *your own child*, its very helplessness and dependence on its mother and friends must, *will*, endear it to you and everybody. Do not speak so harshly, Louisa, it is not natural to you. Your duty lies plain before you, and God will lighten the cross He sends."

"I will do my duty by the child, do not fear."

Poor Helen knew not what further to say, nor how to melt that despairing heart and bring it back to love

and peace; ay, to that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," and "which the world cannot give!"

But the means were already at hand.

The maid had fastened the door carelessly on departing, and it came open soon after. The nursery adjoined, and leaving the unhappy cause of all this misery on the floor, the woman sought a few minutes' gossip with the rest of the household, to narrate the morning's events to their willing ears.

Pepito was accustomed to crawl about the carpet on all fours, sometimes supporting himself on his legs when near a chair or table, and at others tumbling down again to progress as before. In this fashion he often made his way into his mother's room, where he was sure to be welcomed with caresses and cakes. Catching sight of Louisa through the opening door, he made straight for this destination, squeezed noiselessly through the aperture, and when Helen, rising from her knees, was turning away dispirited, she perceived the child close at hand.

Her first impulse was to carry him away ere Louisa remarked him, as she feared the sight would only increase her misery. But on second thoughts she stayed her intention, and with a beating heart and earnest prayer to God waited the event.

Louisa still sat looking over the blue waters, her hands lying listlessly on her knees, and she seemed half unconscious of where she was. A stool was beside her, and steadying himself by its means, Pepito stood staring half frightened at his mother, the expression in whose usually loving countenance was new to him.

Do we not all know how pet animals watch the eyes of those to whom they are attached; what uneasiness and alarm they evince when the lids are closed in sleep

or meditation, or when they are red and tearful? It was thus instinctively with poor Pepito. The eyes that beamed ever fondly on him, now looked vacant and strange, and, stranger still, heeded him not! After repeated tumbles, he scrambled on to the stool, and then resting against his mother's knees, sought one of her hands with all his own little chubby fingers, watching her face intently the while.

All her better nature thrilled at that pleading touch! The child gave an anxious cry, half sob, half moan, most pitiful to hear, and looking down at his upturned eyes, now fast preparing for tears, the poor mother seized the baby in her arms, clasped him tightly to her bosom, and, amid a flood of healing drops, exclaimed,

"Pepito! my child, my child!"

Helen thanked God, for Louisa was saved. She quitted the room softly, leaving the mother and child to comfort each other.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE trials were fixed for the day following the events narrated in the last chapter, and after a long, weary night, the Contessa, early on the morning in question, sat waiting for the arrival of Don Ernesto, the lawyer.

He had promised to call for and conduct her to the Tribunals, on finding that all his endeavours to dissuade her from such a step were fruitless. Louisa, who had once attended the assizes at the good old city of E——, sitting with other ladies comfortably in the High Sheriff's box, and seeing propriety everywhere prevail, — respect for the judges, and consideration for the prisoners, — innocently imagined that a Neapolitan Court of Justice would be conducted on a similar principle. But Don Ernesto knew better — knew that it was no fit place for a lady, who would immediately find herself surrounded by a crowd of rude, staring men, all sure to gaze with bold impertinence and wonder at the strong-minded female who chose to run the gauntlet of their eyes.

Dirt, spitting, pushing, and crowding ; voices so raised as to impress a novice with the idea that everybody must be quarrelling with his neighbour ; terrified, browbeaten witnesses ; threatenings for the truthful, encouragement for the perjured ; abuse and insolence towards the too often innocent criminals, who stood friendless, hopeless, before their persecutors, with wan faces, and figures

wasted and sick from long previous ill-usage and unjust imprisonment, now only expecting the form to be gone through that should consign them to a living grave.

Were such scenes fitted for woman's pitying sight?

Surely not!

The Contessa waited long, — a few short months before, her impatient spirit would have rebelled fiercely at such neglect; but now that proud nature was greatly changed. Her thoughts had ample food for occupation, and she scarce knew how time was racing by, while she sat shawled and bonneted before her untasted breakfast.

She had spent a sleepless night, face to face with her Creator and her conscience. The tears she had wept over poor Pepito had been salutary and healing; maternal love had resumed full sway over her heart, which now revolted at the remembrance of her short delirium, and yearned, if possible, more fondly than before, towards her helpless and dependent child. Who would care for him if his mother turned away in disgust? What strangers would seek to understand his wants, and answer his appealing eyes, and interpret his painful nerve-grating tones? Would any but a mother's love and patience suffice for such a trial? Oh! no.

But in that solitary night-watch, Louisa went still further. It is written,

"Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!" and this in the bitterness of her spirit she had done. Had she not chosen her own lot "for better for worse," and was she now to murmur because, contrary to her expectation, it turned out to be the latter? Was not her sentence just and equitable, more merciful even than she deserved?

"Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?"

But we will not write down all the griefs and wrestlings of that sad spirit, "afflicted, tossed with tempest," yet "comforted" at last. Yes: when the cold grey dawn appeared in the east, then also "the day star" arose in her heart, and she humbly, in all penitence and faith, kissed the cross held out to her, and accepted it *for life!*

The drawing-room door was at last opened, and the lawyer announced by a servant. Louisa rose instantly, prepared to accompany him without loss of time, but as Don Ernesto entered hurriedly, a glance at his face arrested her movements.

"A thousand pardons, Signora Contessa, for having kept you waiting so long, but I could not help the delay."

"You have news?"

"However, you have lost nothing, as the Signor Conte's name is not on the list after all!"

Louisa sat down again without a word, fixing her eyes inquiringly on the lawyer's disappointed countenance.

"Tell me all about it," she said, at length, in a low voice.

"*C'è poco da dire, Signora mia,*" he replied, "it is not customary in this happy country to give reasons why things are done, or left undone. *Mi permette?*" he continued, and taking a chair in accordance with her slight bow of acquiescence, poor Don Ernesto drew forth a handkerchief, and proceeded first to *mop*, and make himself comfortable after his haste. Then he spoke: "Yesterday I got a hint of this, but I could not believe it. I had just reached the Tribunals, and was in the outer room where the lawyers' gowns hang, picking out a decent one for myself*, when one of the *avvocati*

* At the Neapolitan Tribunals, the lawyers' gowns are common property, and hang on pegs in an ante-room, where each comes helps himself ere entering into Court.

came near for the same purpose, and among other things inquired if I had not undertaken the cause of il Conte di Malafede? 'Già,' gli risposi, 'it comes on to-morrow!' 'Stiamo a vedere!' he cried. 'Come?' I asked surprised. 'Because I know for certain that the Conte's name has been struck off the list.' *S'immagini*, how I stared! I begged him to give me further information, but he only shrugged his shoulders, and went into court. People are obliged to be cautious."

"Then his news proved true?" asked Louisa, wearied out by the lawyer's prolixity.

"Pur' troppo! I tried to see one of the judges immediately, but he was out of town for the day, only to return this morning; I hurried about the città seeking for definite information to bring to you, but in vain. I could not trust everybody, and those I tried cautiously could tell me nothing. This morning I got at two of the judges, and they confirmed my friend's information, but would give me no reasons. *Santi numi!* how one's patience is tried here sometimes."

Truly, poor Louisa was a good example of the fact!

"I got at my friend after leaving the judges, and by dint of begging and pressing, he let out that the Conte's name was scratched off the list at the eleventh hour, which he attributed to your petition to Sua Maestà."

"And what does that portend?" eagerly inquired the Contessa.

"Che posso dirle? Speriamo sempre: 'chi spira spera' diciamo noi altri Napolitani!"

She sat musing long on this new state of affairs. The protracted delay was most distressing. She had expected fully to obtain some definite result this day, and now she was again launched forth into a sea of doubt. Any certainty, good or bad, were preferable,

she thought, and the next instant shuddered, as she recollected the result of the same wish, in reference to poor Pepito!

"What is to be done now?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Ah! cara Signora, nothing! What can one do in this country but wait? I hope for the best, however; my friend generally finds out things somehow, and if I can gain further information from him, you shall be the first to know it. But if, as he supposes, your petition to Sua Maestà has effected this sudden change, we may hope for still more satisfactory results. Povera Signora, you have been sorely tried!"

Ah! he did not know how sorely.

"Thank you, Don Ernesto, for all your kindness," she replied, her eyes filling with tears.

"Oh! niente affatto, non ne parliamo, la prego! Ed ora voglio toglierle l'incomodo!" and so, carefully putting away his chair, after repeated assurances of his anxiety for her interest, the good-natured, kindly man took his departure, and Louisa was left once more alone *to think*. Not for long, however, as Helen soon made her welcome appearance. Louisa greeted her with a long embrace.

"Do you forgive me, dear?" she whispered.

"Oh Louisa! what have I to forgive?"

"I made an ungrateful return yesterday for your charity and love!"

"Nay, I knew you were not yourself!" and Helen gazed pityingly at her friend.

"May God also show me mercy! and truly I acknowledge His goodness in sending me such a faithful friend as you are, little Helen;" and Louisa gave her a quivering smile, which touched the Princess's heart, and produced

a sore inclination to cry. But she conquered her weakness resolutely, and then sitting down by the Contessa, and caressing her hand affectionately, she listened to all the other had to relate.

Whatever she felt herself, the Princess tried to make her companion take a cheerful view of this new state of the Count's affairs, and succeeded so well in her good intentions, that Louisa's spirit grew sensibly calmer, and she even spoke quite composedly about her child's affliction.

Helen fervently thanked God for this blessed change in her poor friend. She encouraged her to talk openly on this subject; it was well to face it at once bravely, and grapple with the fact. Nettles only pierce one's flesh when handled delicately, whereas if boldly grasped they lose all power of wounding. It is thus with the greater part of life's troubles. Only walk forth with firm step and erect front, leaning on the staff that never fails, and the weak and weary can do battle with the mighty ones of the earth, even "against the rulers of the darkness of this world."

"The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,
That readest this brief psalm,
As one by one thy hopes depart,
Be resolute and calm.

O, fear not, in a world like this,
And thou shalt know, ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is,
To suffer, and be strong."

Who has not taken these lines of Longfellow to heart,
and pondered them there?

Louisa spoke of Pepito's future, and told Helen how, with God's blessing, she would endeavour to teach him something, however little. In England such afflicted beings were instructed in many things, and might not a mother's love accomplish what was there the work of hirelings? She would do her best, and if she failed, "then,—then," her voice sank for a moment, "you will bear me witness, Helen, that the will has not been wanting!"

Helen's heart was too full to answer, but she pressed her friend's hand in earnest assent.

But,

"Time and the hour run through the longest day."

And thus the Princess was compelled to take her departure, leaving Louisa, however, more peaceful and composed than she had seen her for some time.

Late that same night the Contessa sat vainly striving to peruse the contents of a book. Sleep would not come at her bidding, and though wearied both in mind and body, she felt it would be useless to seek her couch with her brain so full of anxious thoughts. Even now they prevented her from reading, and though her eyes followed the words and lines before her, she failed to realise their meaning, and was so abstracted that she heard not the loud rumble of some heavy vehicle as it rolled under the *porte cochère*.

Soon the door of the saloon was opened quickly, and looking up, startled at the sudden and unexpected intrusion, she found herself confronted by an inspector of police.

Pale and trembling at the unwelcome sight, Louisa could not find words to inquire the cause of this visit;

but the officer did not leave her in suspense, for, in a rough voice, he addressed her as follows:—

“Per la grazia di Sua Maestà nostro adorato Sovrano, il Signor Conte di Malafede is released from detention, and suffered to retire to his terra near Melfi.”

Louisa clutched at the table to support her trembling frame, the revulsion of feeling was so great.

“Più,” continued the callous individual before her, “our merciful sovereign, ever thoughtful of the wishes and happiness of his people, permits the Conte to be accompanied by his wife and child.”

He paused again, expecting a burst of gratitude from the recipient of so much mercy, extended, as it was, to an innocent family. But as the Contessa still preserved silence, he added with increased roughness, owing to his indignation at such favours being thrown away upon undeserving objects, “Signora Contessa, you will therefore prepare to leave Naples this night; it is now nearly *quattr'ore di notte**, you are allowed an hour to make the necessary preparations, when a carriage will await you down stairs.”

“An hour?—to-night?—and my poor child?”

“Via, Signora Contessa, much may be accomplished in an hour if the work be set about actively. My orders are peremptory, and my time is valuable, therefore I can grant no delay.”

“May I take my nurse with me?” she inquired.

The officer drew a paper from his pocket which he examined minutely ere vouchsafing an answer; this he was then graciously pleased to return in the affirmative, muttering to himself, however, “Diamine! più che non meriti!”

* About 11 P. M. in spring.

"Shall I see my husband before leaving Naples?" she asked, stopping on her way to the inner rooms.

"Vi direi bugia," was the laconic and hopeless reply.

The Contessa hastened to her child who was peacefully slumbering in his little cot beside the nurse's bed. The latter was likewise sound asleep, but was quickly roused, and when made to comprehend the state of affairs, did not object to accompany her mistress. She was a Frenchwoman and an invaluable servant, and poor Louisa felt her burden lightened the instant she found this maid would not desert her.

It was a hard struggle against time, but she contrived to get a few valuables and clothes together, with some for her husband, who she doubted not would need them sorely. She also pencilled a few words to Helen, which she confided to her personal attendant to deliver, as Mam'selle Laurette was unwilling to quit the delights of the capital for the wilds of the Basilicata. The Contessa had completed this much when the inspector unceremoniously opened the door of her sleeping apartment, and saying he had already exceeded the allotted time by ten minutes, declared that he should wait no longer.

Carrying the still slumbering baby enveloped in the furniture of its little bed, Louisa and the nurse descended to the courtyard, where they perceived another policeman smoking a cigar beside the carriage. A clumsy dirty *vetturino* drew up at the inspector's bidding—one of those high-perched concerns that make people marvel how their interiors are ever got at. It was drawn by three horses, and had a close musty odour that quite sickened the poor lady as she entered it, half climbing, half pushed up the steep steps. The inspector followed, the other officer mounted beside the

driver, and then the vehicle rattled away amid the awe-struck glances of the porter and remaining domestics.

The night was glorious,—still and calm. There was no moon, but the stars filled the dark vault of heaven by myriads, glittering and sparkling as they only do in the clear atmosphere of southern climes. The streets were silent and deserted as the opera was over, and only a few cafés and eating shops showed any signs of life. The noisy coach with the rattling harness of the horses awoke the slumbering echoes of the desolate-looking city, and Louisa's heart felt sad and chilled at such a dreary leave-taking of bella Napoli. As they skirted the bay the waves plashed softly, musically, on the sandy shores, and occasionally phosphorescent streaks, or a distant red torch denoted some fisher's bark pursuing its hard calling in preparation for the early market. Vesuvius showed fitful gleams of life and activity above the mountain's crest, now sending up a tongue of flame, and anon shrouding itself in darkness.

After the lapse of about half an hour the equipage suddenly stopped. All was very gloomy around, yet the carriage door was opened and the inspector descended, and by the glimmer of a lantern which the driver produced, Louisa could see that the two policemen were alternately whispering together and looking back the way they had come, as if expecting the arrival of some other personages.

The nurse, who had remained silent while the inspector occupied a seat in the carriage, now gave vent to her fears. Pepito at the same instant awaking from a sound slumber, and scared by the darkness, or rendered uncomfortable by the constrained position in which he was held, began to utter hideous cries. Poor Louisa

was almost beside herself: uneasy at the delay, terrified lest the policeman should find fault with her baby's noise, or the nurse's complaints, she strove desperately to reassure the one and quiet the other, though her own mind was most anxious and disturbed.

At length she heard a prolonged whistle, which one of the officers answered, and then followed the sound of an advancing carriage. It stopped close to theirs—a pause, then the door of the *vetturino* opened and a dark figure was hurried in. A policeman jumped on the box, the driver whipped his horses into a gallop, and Louisa found herself in the embrace of her unfortunate husband!

CHAPTER XXIII.

HELEN's astonishment was intense, when, on the following day, Mademoiselle Laurette sought an interview, and delivered the Contessa di Malafede's hurried note, scribbled as it was in pencil.

"DEAREST HELEN,

"My husband is liberated, but ordered to quit Naples, and I am allowed to bear him company. I have but an hour for preparation, wherefore I must refer you to Laurette for particulars. God bless and reward you for all past kindnesses! I shall never forget what I owe you!

"Yours ever,

"LOUISA."

"What does this mean, Laurette?" asked Helen in amazement.

"Ah! que sais-je, Madame la Princesse; cette pauvre chère maitresse était au désespoir! Je n'en sais rien moi, j'étais si troublée, et tellement effrayée!"

And Helen gathered little from her questions; mam'selle was still *troublée et effrayée*, and could only tell her that her mistress had been suddenly ordered to quit Naples at an hour's notice, and that a scene of dire confusion ensued consequent on the difficulty of making a proper and speedy selection of articles to be retained

or left behind. Mam'selle Laurette did not add how little assistance she herself had rendered under the circumstances, nor how careful she had been to secure her own property from possible loss, and the payment of her wages from being forgotten.

"You did not accompany Madame la Comtesse; perhaps you are to follow her?"

"Oh! que non — ma santé est trop mauvaise pour cela! nevertheless I am désespérée at having parted from so excellent a mistress, si bonne, si aimable qu'elle est!"

"I wonder, Laurette, you could desert her at such a moment!" exclaimed Helen, proof against the damsel's tears and sentiment, "and you can't tell me at all where Madame has gone—whether she is still in the kingdom or not?"

Mam'selle thought she had heard some mention of a place called *Malfi* or *Melfi*, but she did not know where it was, and could give the Princess no particulars on the subject.

Helen dismissed the maid with a heavy heart, full of fears for her friend and regrets for her loss. She felt moreover lonely enough now that her only intimate had been so summarily removed; in her dreary existence she clung tenaciously to the one being who reciprocated her love in her foreign home,—it was hard to lose that true companion.

Strange that these two women, who had been acquaintances at a very early age and with no very great *penchant* or admiration for each other,—should latterly have had their hearts suddenly united in a bond of sympathy which promised never to be severed. And yet how inexplicable are the friendships and attachments we form in life! Those who have known each other

longest, joined in the same games and pleasures as children, and together changed into man or womanhood, often find themselves gradually, yet surely, moving along different paths—their tastes, aims, hopes, all separate—understood, sympathised in by neither!

Again, two strangers meet—they exchange some casual remarks;—when a look—a tone—or word will awaken that in the heart of each which will knit them together in a life union.

Helen Mowbray and Louisa Brown would have always remained good friends, in the worldly acceptation of the term,—that is, they would have been studiously civil and attentive to each other when they met, enjoying the degree of familiarity consequent on their early acquaintance; yet to the end of the chapter knowing no more of the inner self of either than the veriest stranger. But chance—that agent which, according to some people, works marvels in our every-day life; and whose existence others, believers in an over-ruling Providence, doubt—*chance* threw those two women together under circumstances that brought out the real disposition of each in strong relief,—one written in characters pure, and fair, and legible; the other in confused and misty lines, with here a blot and there an error, utterly spoiling the beauty of the whole. Yet these opposites had learnt to cling to one another for sympathy and support, and each felt acutely the sudden, cruel severance of the tie.

Helen was still lost in sad musings when her husband entered the room, humming some gay opera air.

“Well, Elena,” he exclaimed lightly, “what’s the matter now? Your face is pinched into all manner of forms, as if you had a cattivo gusto in your mouth—ha, ha!”

“Oh, Gaetano, see what has happened to the Con-

tessa di Malafede," handing him the note she had received.

He perused the paper quietly to the end, then examined the exterior, and afterwards returned it with a shrug of the shoulders and a prolonged "whew!"

Helen grew impatient. Her poor little heart was nigh bursting at the tidings, and yet her husband received them with such indifference.

"Buon viaggio!" he exclaimed at length. "She has managed matters nicely now."

His wife stared at him.

"Where are they off to?" he asked.

"Laurette brought me the note, and mentioned some place called *Malfi*, or *Melfi*, she knew not which."

"Oh, per Bacco! I don't envy them if it's the latter. Now I recollect the Conte di Malafede has some property about there, and I suppose our paternal Government has sent him down to look after it."

"What is it like, Gaetano, and where is it?" asked Helen, anxiously.

"In the Basilicata; a horrible place, where they will have malaria, and enjoy the divertimento of an earthquake two or three times a month at least."

His wife shuddered.

"I am only surprised," continued the Prince, "that any house is supposed to be left standing to receive them. The town has been knocked down so often, that I wonder at any one taking the trouble to build it up again."

"Oh! Gaetano, this is too horrible! what will become of Louisa in such a frightful spot?"

"She must learn to do as others have done before her; the Malafedes are not the only esiliati from the capital of the Two Sicilies."

"But what dreadful injustice towards an innocent man, a noble too! Why they might, with as much reason, send *you* into the provinces."

"Già."

"How quietly you do sit listening! An Englishman's blood would boil at such injustice—he would never bear it so calmly; the whole nation would rise in arms and opposition," cried Helen, indignantly.

"Ah! its all very well to talk, ma

'Dal dicho, al hecho
Hay gran trecho.'

Why don't your brave English friends come and help us out of the scrape?"

"Rather, why don't you help yourselves? It is mean and pitiful to sit down meekly under a system of such wicked tyranny, and then complain because strangers don't release you from it."

"And may I ask, how are we to release ourselves?"

"Courage and unanimity in a good cause may do much."

"Ah! you would like me to get my neck into the noose, ma, mille grazie, non mi persuado! I value *la mia pelle* too much, to risk it in a wild-goose adventure after liberty and what not."

Helen looked at her husband with something very like scorn in her expressive eyes.

"And can you not feel that such treatment towards one innocent member of your order reflects upon the whole body of nobility that so humbly kisses the rod? How can you all bow and kneel to the man that treats you with such contempt? Does he not laugh you to scorn for cringing so low before a fellow mortal? The Conte di Malafede, the victim of such injustice, is more

honourable by far than the high titled gentlemen who look on composedly without adventuring a word, or lifting so much as a finger in behalf of their suffering countryman."

"Evviva la Signora Principessa!" exclaimed Castebianco with a sneering laugh that aggravated Helen's excited feelings still more. "You appear to forget that *I* also am one of those *high titled gentlemen*, and a Neapolitan into the bargain."

Poor Helen! she would have given much to be able to forget the fact.

"Forgive me," she said hurriedly, colouring much at having been betrayed into such a burst of irritation; "but oh! dear Gaetano, I wish you and your fellows would do something to free your unhappy country from its bondage—that you would endeavour to find a remedy for the evil which cries aloud even to Heaven for redress!" and her whole form dilated and her beautiful eyes filled with earnest feeling as she spoke.

"Per dirti la verità, I've no fancy for your English notions of liberty and equality. Sua Maestà knows best how to govern the rabble, and what is suited to their intelligence; and because one or two unlucky devils are imprisoned unjustly, that is no reason why the whole system should be condemned. In our country a noble's rights and privileges are considered, which is not the case in yours, where every tinker and tailor is as good as his master in the eye of the law. Bah! what does it signify what becomes of such canaille?"

"The Conte di Malafede is neither *tinker* nor *tailor*," said Helen, "neither does he belong to the so-called *canaille*. Will you not allow that his particular case is cruelly hard?"

"Why did his wife make such a fool of herself by

quarrelling with Torlone? She must have known what a dangerous enemy she was creating."

"How could she have acted otherwise than she did? Surely you will not condemn her for resisting a gross insult and injury?"

"Figlia mia, a woman of the world like the Contessa di Malafede, ought to have known better than to quarrel about trifles where life and safety were concerned. She might have been decently civil to Torlone, and so kept her husband from his villeggiatura at Melfi; because she can't care a pin about the Conte—a man old enough to be her father."

"Under similar circumstances would you have had *me* treat the Baron Torlone differently?" inquired Helen composedly.

Her husband glanced at her quickly with that in his eyes which boded no good to herself or the baron had Helen put her supposition into practice.

"Vià, Elena, don't be nonsensical!" he exclaimed pettishly. "You must know me well enough to be aware how I should act in such a case. The baron is a vagabond as everybody can tell, but he is also a dangerous foe, and that the Malafedes can answer for."

Helen seeing that her husband was perversely inclined, cared not to prolong the discussion. She knew it was useless to attempt to gain him over to her view of the question; he rather enjoyed the fun of thwarting her, and she had learnt discretion, usually keeping her thoughts and opinions on passing events to herself, except, as in this instance, the interest of the subject carried her away involuntarily. She grieved sincerely for her friend's troubles, and also lamented the loss she should herself experience in her companionship. Poor Helen had no friends at Naples amid a large circle of

acquaintance; for who could form a friendship, according to English ideas of the same, with any frivolous daughter of Naples? and the prince threw difficulties in the way of her associating intimately with those of her own country. The Neapolitans, though studiously polite, did not regard her as one of themselves, while she felt provoked with them for the marked slights shown to the English generally in society; although these very travellers were annually expected with eagerness to circulate money in a famishing, half-ruined country. Castelbianco never spared his expressions of ridicule and contempt for those heretic islanders,—laughed at the ladies' fashions,—and, in the same breath anathematized the men for not sending an army and fleet to free his country from its bondage. Was ever such inconsistency!

His wife became sadly familiar with the Neapolitan character—at once so full of cowardice, and braggadocio, of petty envyings and jealousies; self ever paramount, annihilating every prospect of benefit to the country at large, to the people or individuals. And yet their good temper (not her husband's), and loud professions of kindness, often made her hesitate to condemn them finally. She tried to believe it was not all mere talk; but her good feelings vanished the very next time her religion was called in question, and her lost condition was made the subject of commiseration.

No; Helen found her adopted country-people amusing, good-natured where no great sacrifice was entailed, and in society most courteous; but she could not discover in their hearts that bit of pure gold, which is said to be unearthed, after a seven years' patient research, in a cold, formal English character.

Months passed without tidings of Louisa, and Helen grew sick with apprehension on her account. Castalbiano cautioned her against speaking publicly about the Malafedes' fate; he tried hard to have it believed they had never been acquainted, and was ready with a shrug of the shoulders, or a scornful ejaculation, if questioned about his friends.

One day, however, Jones with a beaming countenance brought her mistress a letter.

"Please, my lady, I hope there is good news at last."

"Oh Jones! who brought it?"

"A country-looking fellow, my lady, who desired me to give the letter into your own hands."

"Let him be cared for," and locking her door carefully after the faithful attendant's departure, Helen eagerly tore open, and perused the following lengthy epistle.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Letter from la Contessa di Malafede to la Principessa di Castelbianco.

“DEAREST HELEN,

“If you received the few words I pencilled in haste and confided to Laurette’s keeping the night of my sudden departure from Naples, you will not have felt any surprise at my long silence. It has been very reluctant on my part, I can assure you, but I have been afraid to send a letter through the ordinary channels; at least till we shall have proved to our superiors, by continued good behaviour, what well-conducted people we are become! On this occasion I shall be able to write more unreservedly, as I have the chance of sending by a private hand, through the kindness of a neighbour who has evinced as much sympathy for us as any one dare show in a land, where spies are ever on the watch to report and twist to one’s harm the most innocent proceeding. But I must go back in my narrative, and begin it from the hour of our quitting Naples.

“It was midnight when we left the city behind us, and doubts and fears so filled my mind as to the future, that I even felt regret at quitting a place where, in truth, I have had but a scanty portion of peace—not to mention happiness. Yet, sadness I think always accompanies the *last time* of seeing, or doing anything; how much

more when it entails a separation from a true, loving heart such as yours, little Helen! And when can I hope to see you again?

"The Cerberus in charge of us merely informed me that I was graciously allowed to share my husband's exile, and as he would not descend to particulars, I could only imagine that we should first meet in this wretched spot—for it *is wretched*, and well suited for a place of banishment. But when we were about a mile out of Naples, the *vetturino* stopped, the inspector got out, and he and another policeman, who had mounted beside the driver, had a long whispered consultation in the centre of the high road. The night was so dark, though fine, that I could not see beyond the feeble light cast by a lantern which one of the *sbirri* now produced. I grew terribly nervous,—Pepito woke at the moment and began his dreadful cries; and the nurse Annette,—who, faithful creature! had readily consented to follow my fortunes—was by this time weeping, and uttering smothered ejaculations of fear, lest we were about to be murdered or imprisoned in some frightful dungeon. I was driven to scold her into silence, which again almost broke into shrieks at the sound of a peculiar whistle followed by the noise of an approaching vehicle. Our guards were shortly joined by others, and after some whispering together they opened the door of our crazy *vettura*, threw in a bundle of what seemed to be clothes of some sort or other, and then by the glimmer of the lantern I saw them conduct a man from the other carriage—a street cab only—and hurry him towards ours. He was pushed in almost as unceremoniously as the bundle had been before, and then, the last glint of the lamp as we drove off showed me the face of my husband. But so changed, Helen!

so pale and wasted, and with full ten years added to his age! my heart quite bled for him, and was filled with bitter self-reproach for my wicked neglect of him in the early portion of our married life. During his cruel detention he can only have had painful thoughts of me and my past conduct to increase his distresses — and now he would have to be told about Pepito. What a disclosure to have to make! In Annette's presence we could not converse freely, and we were besides afraid of spies, as one of the *sbirri* still accompanied us, though remaining on the outside of the vehicle: this man wore plain clothes.

“Thus we travelled all that night, with what comfort you may imagine, when I tell you that our *vetturino* was one of the most miserable I ever set eyes on. The body of it was wretchedly small, and perched on the highest possible elevation, so that we overlooked every passing object. It was hung on leathern straps instead of springs, and shook every bone in our bodies as it rumbled heavily on its way. I had but one box with me, which was fastened behind to a rough stage contrived for the purpose; a ragged attendant looked after it, and shared his seat occasionally with tired pedestrians, who got a lift on paying the driver a small *buona-mano*. Our guard sat in front with the latter, who did not appear to relish his society, to judge by his silence and black looks. In the interior, the cushions of the coach must have been stuffed with the square blocks of lava used for paving stones, while the ill-closed glasses let in a current of air that speedily gave me a stiff neck. To add to these discomforts our feet were nearly frozen, and when daylight broke the reason became obvious; there was no carpet or straw, and the rude planks that composed the

flooring were in many places several inches apart, so that one could look through them at the dusty road we were pursuing.

"The night was very cold for the season of the year; poor Luigi was weak and shivering, and the few wraps I had with me hardly availed to cover him and the child. At daybreak we stopped at a wretched, filthy *paese*, where some hot *café noir* was brought us from the hovel dignified as the *locanda*. In spite of sundry misgivings as to the process it had undergone in the concoction, hunger obliged us to accept it, and this, together with some really good home-made country bread, revived us considerably.

"After this breakfast, by appealing to the driver, when his companion's back was turned, he obtained some straw with which we stopped up the holes in the coach as well as we were able with such materials. While we were thus employed the man cautiously whispered, —

"' *Celenza*, my *paese* is close to Melfi, and the Signor Conte is my padrone, therefore I will serve you whenever I can.'

"I dared not answer, except by a grateful look, for I saw that the guard had approached us again. We rumbled on with fresh horses, somewhat invigorated by our short rest. All that day we continued our journey, though with occasional halts to bait the animals, which were not again changed; thus our progress was painfully slow, and the uneasy carriage and jolting roads made us all suffer greatly. We observed, when stopping anywhere for meals, that we were always taken to the most miserable *locanda* the place contained; the food consequently was most sickening, dressed as it was with garlic and rancid oil. My friend the driver, when

we reached Nocera, procured me some bread and fresh *cacciavacallo**, on which I dined, and a glass of goat's milk with a few biscuits for poor Pepito. Luigi was used to his national cookery, and had fared too ill for several months past to refuse what was placed before him. Annette also liked their savoury messes; therefore, selecting the cleanest seat near an open door or window for the sake of *pure air*, I held my poor boy while the others ate.

"We reached Salerno that night, where our guard informed us we were to sleep. Quitting the Marina, where I noticed some presentable houses, the *vetturino* proceeded at a snail's pace up a back street, so narrow that pedestrians had to seek shelter in the shops to escape being knocked down by our horses. Here we were taken to a house where the filth exceeded even *my* powers of imagination, and that is saying a good deal in this country, you will allow! A fearful odour of cooking and *minestra* pervaded the staircase, in ascending which I caught a glimpse of the kitchen, where a dirty man and woman were frying some fish in train oil, I should say. My hunger vanished. At this inn we were all ushered into one moderate-sized room containing two decent-looking beds on tressels. Truly it is a virtue in Naples that whatever else may be filthy the beds are sure to be clean. We begged for other quarters for the nurse and child, which produced a stare and mutterings of its impossibility; but turning to our gaoler, who had followed to see how we were lodged, I succeeded in softening what I suppose was his heart, and another smaller chamber was allotted to Annette and Pepito, who were quickly asleep, totally

* A white cheese made from goat's milk.

unmoved by the blackbeetles which swarmed everywhere. To escape from these disgusting insects, I got on my bed and sat there while Luigi had some supper in the same room, and then he could speak, and I listen for the first time in peace.

"Helen, dearest, *I dare not* write openly of what he has undergone, the indignities, the dirt, and misery, — he, a noble and an educated man, guiltless of offence, accused of no crime, the victim only of a villain's spite and hatred. To think of that base coward Torlone choosing such a mode of injuring me and mine! Verily he has had an ample revenge, and must be surely content. I may only tell you that Luigi was never removed from the Prefettura, though subsequently confined in far different quarters to those in which we visited him. More the safety of us all forbids my stating or your reading.

"The following morning I feasted on *café au lait*, and then we were speedily boxed up again in the coach. Our destination was Eboli, situated at the extremity of the Plain of Pæstum, but on higher ground, commanding a fine view of the Gulf of Salerno, and backed by wooded hills. Here we rested at an inn that was formerly a monastery, where we met with more cleanliness than I had hoped for. The fare was by no means luxurious, but I had already ceased to expect delicacies in these wilds. We were now surrounded by malaria, and my heart sank at the prospect of my husband or child being attacked by this subtle enemy, whose mark I saw on many a sickly form. From hence we had a good view of the fine forest of Persano with its palace.

"Eboli, I believe, was of some importance in the middle ages, and gave the title of Prince to Ruy Gomez de Silva, favourite and minister of Philip II. of Spain; it

now belongs to the Angri family. We were told this neighbourhood was noted for brigands, and I confess I commenced the next day's journey with a feeling of nervousness that was not quieted by the aspect of the country, which was wild and apparently uninhabited. Our horses, poor half-starved animals, could hardly compass the steep ascent, added to which our own anxious minds rendered the journey as painful as it was tedious. Poor Luigi was weak and suffering, and I feared that an illness was beginning for him; while Annette, the nurse, was constantly dreading every possible and impossible evil in the shape of robbers, murderers, and prisons. I was very near despair sometimes, but I endeavoured to keep up my own spirits for the sake of my companions. At length our wretched horses struck work entirely, and we were compelled to alight and rest the poor wearied animals in those dreary solitudes, and afterwards progress slowly on foot, while the driver and policeman vied with each other in the tales of brigandage and plunder they recounted; such arrant cowards did they prove. The scenery was wild and desolate in the extreme, very hilly and very bare, and our spirits sank lamentably under its saddening influence. After much walking we reached a dismal-looking *taverna*, where we sought shelter for the night. The people seemed half afraid to admit strangers, as they were few in number, yet the padrone at last opened the door, and to me even that wretched hovel was preferable to the constant martyrdom of the *vetturino*.

"We were now in the vicinity of Muro, in whose castle the ill-fated Queen Joan met with a violent death. The country round was barren and deserted, and even Luigi's courage sank at the prospect of being buried

alive in such a neighbourhood. He had never yet visited his paternal property, and, like most Neapolitans, greatly preferred the capital to such thorough banishment. Our accommodation was not luxurious, as the *taverna* only boasted of one large chamber below, which united kitchen, living, and sleeping room in one. The floor was earthen, and the walls were blackened by smoke, as one corner was occupied by a wide open chimney, in which a heap of damp green faggots was smouldering; near this stood the bed of the *padroni di casa*. The raised stoves for culinary purposes were ranged at the opposite end of this dismal room. A ladder led up to a garret overhead, which was assigned to Annette, baby, and me, while Luigi and the guard passed the night in the *vetturino*.

“All this took longer to plan than it does to describe, as the *tavernaro*, whom we had roused from his slumbers, was by no means anxious to help us. The sight of our guard induced at first an unwilling obedience; but after pointing out to our disconsolate, weary gaze this scanty accommodation, all he could give us, he very quietly retreated to his bed, followed by his better half, and so left us to make the best arrangements we could for the night. This hero was about seventy-five years of age, short, and asthmatic, so that his unwonted exertion and excitement produced much puffing and wheezing as he laboured about the hovel. His wife looked a woman of thirty, tall and large, with good features; and when the pair retired to their couch, I could have laughed, had I been less weary and heartsick, at the contrast these two figures presented. A *mariage de convenance* doubtless. Ah, Helen! does that dread farce prevail likewise in the humbler walks of life?

“The following morning early, after a miserable

repast, we again started on our way, through a bleak ravine, and soon found ourselves amid the scenes of the recent earthquakes. Atella, Rionero, and Barile are close together on the eastern slope of Mount Vulture, and are traversed by the high road, but no words can tell their desolate aspect, deserted by their chief inhabitants, with the houses mostly in ruins, and their few remaining occupants wearing an expression of constant dread on their countenances. We are told that ever since 1851 the shocks of earthquake have been constant in these parts, and though the houses have been propped up and supported in a certain fashion, I should think very little would suffice to bring them about one's ears. And, Helen, this neighbourhood is henceforth to be my home! At times I shrink from the prospect—such utter banishment from kindred and enlightened spirits; such an impossibility of obtaining books, or aught to keep the mind from stagnating. Yet let me proceed with my narrative.

“Atella proved a miserable village, and was followed by Rionero, which was no better, containing some dirty streets that were dull and lifeless. The inhabitants of Barile originally came from Epirus, whence several colonies were induced to visit and settle in the Neapolitan dominions, their descendants often understanding no dialect but the Albanian. This town is on a higher elevation than the two former, and boasts of a more extensive view across the Capitanata to Mount Garganus and the sea. It is a wretched place, filled with an idle, good-for-nothing, and sickly population, which has become latterly still more helpless and miserable since the dreadful earthquakes that have decimated the neighbourhood. The origin of all this calamity, Mount Vulture, an extinct volcano, is well

wooded and cultivated, its northern flank overlooking Melfi, our place of exile. This mountain is detached from the chain of the Apennines, which here terminates on the confines of Basilicata and Apulia. Olive trees and vineyards afforded the chief produce of Barile till the failure of the grapes, but the people are extensively engaged—though clandestinely—in the manufacture of gunpowder, the process being carried on in the caves and holes of the surrounding mountains. Venosa, celebrated as being the birthplace of Horace, is attainable, I believe, from Barile.

“Poor Luigi began now seriously to complain; the privations and trials he had undergone in prison, followed by this fatiguing progress through an unhealthy district when his frame was in a weakened state, prepared him to catch any disorder, and he was soon seized with shiverings and cold. Still he wished to complete his journey, and resisted all my entreaties that he would rest at Barile; in this he was much influenced by a desire to be rid of the policeman, who plainly told us that his orders were to escort us to Melfi, and therefore the sooner we got there the better; but this was easier said than done.

“The driver was in despair about his wretched horses, and demanded for them a full day’s rest, which the guard peremptorily refused, threatening him with summary punishment if he failed in his engagements. There was a footpath across the hills to Melfi which shortened the distance by a mile or two, but it was so steep and precipitous that none of us could attempt it, our party including as it did a sick man, a nurse and baby. The carriage road called La Rendina would take longer, but had to be selected, though the inn-keeper at Barile, in his anxiety to detain us at his house, assured us it was too bad to be practicable.

"As our animals were quite knocked up, a messenger was sent to Melfi to obtain some from thence, and a miserable despairing figure these presented when they appeared! All these *contretemps* delayed us greatly, and thus daylight waned as we were setting out, while gathering clouds betokened rain. It shortly began to fall, and as we turned out of the *via nuova*, or high road from Eboli (which is continued to Ascoli,) a violent clap of thunder broke suddenly overhead and alarmed us terribly, it was so unexpected. The horses, being frightened, kicked and plunged till they broke some of the half-rotten traces, when the snortings and noise of the animals, the curses of the driver and guard, alternated with invocations to the saints, and the continued peals of thunder which rattled overhead and awoke the thousand echoes of those dreary solitudes, made up a period of confusion and terror that was heightened by the darkness — the lightning alone affording us any gleams of illumination.

"At length some mountaineers, attracted by our cries, came to us from a tavern situated at the cross roads, and with their assistance the horses were quieted and led back to the hostelry, where the traces were mended as usual with packthread. Here we waited till the violence of the storm abated and the thunder ceased. Then as by magic the rain stopped, the stars shone out, and no evidence remained of the recent war of the elements but a muddy road and dripping trees.

"It was very late when we reached our destination, as the steepness of the ascent rendered our progress very slow; this was also greatly impeded by a violent wind that arose, and which, issuing from the cavernous depths and recesses of Mount Volture, is peculiar to this neighbourhood, and frequently disturbs it, when trees may

be heard falling and crashing against each other in the dense forests.

* * * * *

“A week has elapsed, dearest Helen, since I commenced this long letter. My messenger failed me at the last moment, and I must now wait till another chance offers itself, for I dare not intrust my packet to the post, lest it never reach its destination. The postal arrangements here are none of the brightest—example: a lady living at a *paese* only a few miles distant was lately confined, and the news was despatched to us, among other acquaintances, by post, and took a week to reach us! *Our* correspondence is doubtless scrutinised closely, so I must needs be careful as to its conveyance, for I am sure you will prefer the delay to the receipt of merely a few commonplace lines about nothing.

“It was late when we reached *home* (!)—oh! Helen, if you could see its comfortless aspect even now! The bare rooms, the walls presenting fissures everywhere, the effects of the earthquakes; the plaster off in many places; doors and windows that will not fasten; the common and scanty furniture! When after much knocking we succeeded in rousing the sleeping guardians of the place, and procured an entrance—they fearing all the time it was an inroad of robbers—I felt almost in despair at the ruinous appearance of the building, and had not the necessity of prompt exertion stimulated me, I almost think I should have sat down on the ground—chairs were scarce—and cried myself blind! But, thank God, I had not time to waste on regrets; it was necessary to get Luigi to a bed as quickly as possible, and there was none ready in the house. The *colono* and his wife, who farm the property, had only their own little portion of furniture,

for the house, as I before mentioned, has not been visited by any member of my husband's family for an age. These good people, however, gave up their bed to the sick padrone, bringing out all their small stock of linen for our use. And from this couch my poor husband did not rise for many days. He is now gradually mending, but I dread a recurrence of his fever in the approaching autumn, a season particularly open to such illnesses.

"Melfi is considered very insalubrious, though the natives look healthier than their neighbours of Barile; but the damp here is excessive, as every night our clothes are saturated with it. We have no prospect of neighbourly acquaintance or society in the place, and all communication with the adjoining towns and villages is most difficult owing to the badness of the roads. The route we traversed from Naples was the worst and least used, and I can only account for its having been selected on the plea of our journey being made as secretly as possible, wherefore we were also always taken to the most wretched and least frequented inns.

"Melfi chiefly belongs to Prince Doria Pamfili of Rome, for whose use an apartment is kept furnished in the old castle, which stands apart from the town. But I doubt whether this noble ever honours his possessions with a visit. The streets are narrow, dirty, and most of them painfully steep. The houses are better outside than in, and are remarkable for large inscriptions on the front mentioning the names, rank, &c. of the founder or owner, for the information of the public. But earthquakes have nearly ruined everything, and we have already felt some slight shocks ourselves.

"I believe the old castle, which still bears an impos-

ing aspect, was nearly the first fortress erected by the Normans in this part of the country; the town was built by the sons of Tancred of Hauteville, and was in process of time conferred on the illustrious Andrea Doria by Charles V. In 1528 it underwent a siege from a portion of Lautrec's army. There is a cathedral whose tower was built in 1151 by William, son of Roger, who founded the kingdom. And thus much of history and description relative to Melfi will doubtless content both yourself and me.*

"But what shall I write about myself,—my present life, my future hopes, fears, and prospects? Perhaps the less on this subject the better. I do not, will not despair. My husband's broken health and spirits will require me to exert all my energies to support and cheer him, and my poor child is dependent on me likewise for what little instruction he can receive. Yet do not fear for me, dear friend; strength will surely be given me in the hour of need, as it has been vouchsafed to me all along. My great longing is to hear from you; therefore write me full letters when you can do so by private hand, but even a line by post will suffice to assure me that you are well. This letter will be delivered to you by the driver of our vetturino, who offered his services to me on the first night of our journey. He proved himself so anxious and willing then to assist us, that I am tempted to incur the risk. Embrace your sweet child for me, and remember me kindly to the Prince; and with constant prayers for your health and happiness, believe, dearest Helen, in the constant attachment of

"Your affectionate

"LOUISA."

* For a fuller account of Melfi and the neighbourhood, see vol. ii. of Craven's "Excursions in the Abruzzi."

CHAPTER XXV.

LET us pass over some months, months which grew into years, bringing with them but a scanty share of joy and peace to our heroine,—shall we say *heroines*? for we hope that by this time Louisa Contessa di Malafede is not devoid of interest in our readers' eyes. She still continued in her mountain solitude, exchanging letters with her friend at long intervals. These were only satisfactory when either writer sent them to their destination by a private messenger who could be trusted. Then each lady indulged in a full account of her daily life, though both with one accord endeavoured to brighten the recital as much as possible; a difficult task sometimes, but a praiseworthy one, for is it not a pity to fill up the small space of a letter with complaints of evils which perchance may cease to exist when the epistle is read at its journey's end? Is it not well to write always kindly, or not at all? Have we not all at some time or other sat down with the ill-humour and vexation of the moment strong upon us, and penned such lines as satisfied our temporary indignation, at the expense of a constant future regret?

"La penna mi s' è piena di dolore,
Il calamajo di malinconia,
L'inchiostro è fatto coll' aceto forte."

And perhaps the writer has forgotten both cause and effect by the time the friend receives the long-expected despatch, opens it hurriedly, eagerly, and is instantly

filled by its contents with bitterness and disappointment! It is easier to *unsay* than to *unwrite* cross words.

The Princess's days passed monotonously enough with regard to the outer world, while her inner life was only varied by her husband's ill humour and fits of passion, which rather gathered strength and frequency than showed any signs of diminution. Helen saw but little of him at home, and when she did, usually sat trembling for what might happen, as a look, a word, a smile, sufficed to draw down the storm on her devoted head.

One day that she was at her milliner's looking at the new fashions for the season, Madame —— expressed a hope that she had been satisfied with the Parisian capote Monsieur le Prince ordered for Madame sa femme?

Helen was surprised and rather gratified at such very unusual attention in her husband, who seldom made her any *cadeaux*, while the veriest trifle given as a *gage d'amour* has more value in the eyes of the recipient than the costliest purchases effected by oneself. She replied with a smile that she had not yet seen it, and therefore concluded it was intended to be a pleasant surprise. However, she reposed full confidence in Madame ——'s perfect taste.

The fashionable modiste bowed her acknowledgments for the compliment, but said, with rather an odd expression of countenance, that there was probably some mistake, the capote having been sent home a fortnight or three weeks before.

The Princess's amazement grew at these words, but she proceeded hurriedly to state the business that had brought her there, and then hastened away, without listening to Madame ——'s polite hopes that she had

not betrayed a confidence, or spoilt any little surprise planned for her by Monsieur le Prince.

Happily the poor lady did not see the smile exchanged behind her back between Madame —— and her forewoman.

Helen was puzzled at the delay in the gift, but she felt pleased at the unwonted kindness, and returned home with a lighter heart than usual. She found her husband in a remarkably sunny temper for him, to which she eagerly responded, telling him where she had been, what she had seen, and whom she had met. At last, with a repressed smile, she said,—

“Gaetano, you do not ask what I wanted at Madame ——’s.”

“How can I tell what you required? Flowers or a head-dress perhaps.”

“I went to look at her bonnets—amongst other things.”

“Ah! well, I hope you got a pretty one;” and he yawned wearily without evincing much care for her reply.

The Princess looked at him for an instant, and then said, “Madame —— informed me that you had already forestalled my wants—it was very kind, *mon ami*.”

“I?” speaking sharply and hurriedly, “what do I know about buying anything for a lady’s toilette? You have only to order what you want, I suppose, to have it!”

“Then you did not intend a surprise for me, after all?” and Helen’s countenance fell. “How could Madame —— make up such a story?—but I will ring and inquire if anything was sent here from the *magasin* by mistake;” she rose and had hold of the bell-rope, when Castelbianco burst into a furious passion.

“What did she mean by going about the town prying

into his affairs, and cross-questioning milliners and servants about him? Had he not a right to order bonnets, or anything else, for whom he chose, without having to render an account to his wife for his actions?"

In vain Helen strove to arrest the torrent by pleading her innocence of all desire to give offence: that Madame — had started the question herself by naturally inquiring how she had liked her husband's purchase. Poor Helen only added to the fire by every word she spoke. Castalbiano swore at the modiste for letting her woman's tongue run on about his concerns, swore at his wife for her ill-disguised attempt to find out his secrets, and finally, when fairly out of breath, he strode up to his terrified victim, and seizing her arm in his iron grasp, with a rude shake, swore he would kill her if she ever meddled with his private affairs again!

He left her stunned and half fainting, and went his way, breathing vengeance against her d——d woman's curiosity—"but *he* would teach her how to cross-question him again! Did she think she was not only to burden him at home, but have a right to interfere with his outdoor amusements? Ah! *si vedrà—aspetti un poco, bella mia!*"

She sat wringing her hands with tearless eyes, and thus, late into the night, faithful Jones discovered and urged her to go to bed and take care of herself.

Ah! yes, if Heaven granted her a son, perhaps Gaetano would like her better; he was always wishing for one to bear his title. And poor Helen rose from her low seat with tottering limbs and feeble steps.

Jones's heart bled for her unhappy young mistress. She had witnessed many such scenes as the above, and now could barely treat the Prince with common civility, while he, for his part, cordially detested the honest

Englishwoman for her devotion to his wife. He had often urged Helen to dismiss her, but she clung desperately to this her only friend, the last remaining link of her old happy home life. Castelbianco feared to insist lest Jones should make disagreeable revelations at the Priory, and thus master and maid continued to endure each other's presence as an inevitable evil.

For some days after this Castelbianco scarcely addressed a word to his wife, while it was not in human nature for her to beg pardon, like a naughty child, and pray to be forgiven this once. No! her whole soul revolted against the indignities she underwent at his hands. Poor Helen, delicately nurtured in a refined home, had been accustomed to ascribe brutality and coarseness in a man to the neighbourhood of St. Giles. There, foul language and blows were perhaps the lot of some unhappy woman tied to a drunken companion for life, but among gentlepeople she had never conceived them possible, till her residence at Naples and her own experience opened her eyes to the truth. Here she had heard it said that "such a one beats his wife," or "A. and B. quarrel and fight outrageously," and she had only listened *incredulously*, or, when the fact was confirmed, with a feeling of intense disgust at any people in a respectable rank of life being guilty of such enormities. Her Neapolitan acquaintances only laughed at her unbelief, pointing out to her notice various *ménages*, which she had considered decent and well conducted, as the constant scenes of such scandal. And Helen's eyes would thereupon open wide in horror and amazement. Alas! she had long ceased to doubt; the truth was come home to her, and, but that her sweet nature forbade her using recrimination as a weapon of defence, the Palazzo Castelbianco might have

witnessed many a revolting scene within its old walls. Yet her constant submission only seemed to incense her husband; he would have preferred a Neapolitan wife who could have given him scratches and words in return for the weight of his strong arm. Such sport would have been exciting enough; but "Elena was such a poor weak thing without any spirit!"

Truly, Helen's spirit died within her through shame and mortification. She almost felt as if all around were eyes that stared mockingly at her; as if the servants smiled significantly in her presence; as if all her acquaintance pointed her out as the victim of a husband's brutality!

Let not the reader imagine that these details are exaggerated. It does not follow that Neapolitan nobles, because of their high rank and old ancestry, must be *gentlemen*; events of daily occurrence prove the contrary; and whereas in society the outward polish shines well, and with a certain glitter, it is better not to examine it too closely lest the veneering becomes apparent. Those who have lived long at Naples know this thoroughly—know how rotten society is at the core, and are apt to wonder how a regenerated Italy, composed of strength and sinew, is to be made out of the materials which the foot of the boot will contribute towards the work! It is commonly recommended that people should look at home, ere finding fault with their neighbours' houses; and even so it is to be feared that until Neapolitan fathers and mothers of families recognise the necessity of improvement in their own household affairs, they stand a bad chance of being able to modify the government of the nation. *Young Naples* must be educated on a different system to the long prevailing one; must be used to see decency, gentleness, and forbearance between

its parents, ere it can realise a practice of give and take in the commonwealth.

In constitutional England men cannot beat their wives, nor the said wives scratch their husbands' faces, without risking a summons to Bow Street, if in the middle classes; or being *sent to Coventry* by their equals, if in the higher; but at Naples 'tis a recognised privilege of nobility to use club and *fist* law, and great are the scandals consequent thereon.

Poor Helen! though she imagined all eyes to be turned upon her in scorn and derision, by no means stood alone amid her fellows. As a Neapolitan wife she ought to have been accustomed to such treatment, but as an English one—thank Heaven!—it was a hard matter to get reconciled to.

Naples was very dull in those days, the sun of majesty had hid itself behind a cloud of displeasure, with only very brief intervals of relenting, and fitful gleams of brightness in the shape of balls. In that loyal capital society is at a stand-still, is utterly stagnated if Majesty deign not to smile on its faithful subjects. Once upon a time some subscription balls were started, in which everything, money, guests, music and dancers, flourished, but vitality failed, because etiquette forbade the Sovereign to patronise them! That or nothing was the universal cry, and in a fit of disgust those entertainments were given up.

The Accademia réunions grew more and more frigid latterly, for lack of the King's presence; and as Ferdinand II. anticipated revolutions, plots and assassinations as much in ball-rooms as in the open streets, it was difficult to maintain an appearance of gaiety and cheerfulness against such odds.

Moreover, society was torn by internal dissensions.

Helen about this time attended a select *conversazione* at the Prussian ambassador's, wherein the elements could not be brought to amalgamate. It was during the Crimean war; and one might have seen a knot of English in one corner, ditto French in another, Russians in a third, while the so-called *neutral* Neapolitans frowned blackly at the two former, and consorted with the latter with the greatest homogeneity.

Verily, those gallant fellows belonging to the British Legion did in a most Christian spirit forgive and forget the many slights put upon their country people within the last ten years, by volunteering to fight for a nation that will not fight for itself!

The Neapolitans with all their good nature and simplicity are well able to look after their own interests; and though towards the close of the monarchy they thought it better policy to give the English cold shoulder, they have now found it equally convenient to embrace them most lovingly, as "their dear brothers" who are to fight for and deliver them.

Helen, though nominally one of them, sided in heart with her own country people, whose battles she often had to engage in, they being regarded by this enlightened race as revolutionary, heretical, and fast becoming a pest to all those nations who preserve intact the good old customs and ideas of their forefathers. She was frequently annoyed at the ignorance displayed by the higher classes of the natives, but equally disgusted by the conceit and self-satisfaction with which they hugged their chains. The Tuscan adage, "*Mio padre faceva così*," was the motto adopted, and acted upon by all ranks; when will "excelsior" in all honesty and faith replace it?

And thus monotonously the months had fled. The

brief Carnival, a mere shadow of its former merry self; the dreary Lent, followed by an unhealthy spring, a burning summer and a splendid autumn. Helen's strength and health did not thrive under the climate. The intense summer heat relaxed her delicate frame, while the cold winter — all the more severe from the great contrast — tried her sorely in her large house with its lofty rooms, stone floors, ill-fitting doors and windows, and scanty firing. She missed the invigorating out-door English pursuits: the long country walks and rides, the home occupations, the care of her poorer neighbours and the tenants. *That* was a healthy active life, *this* comparative stagnation, varied only by balls, operas, and the daily drive on the Chiaja. Yet Helen luxuriated in that of which England can rarely boast — a clear atmosphere and bright sunshiny days even in mid winter. Ah! only those who have exchanged both for constant fogs and rain, not only in winter time, but too frequently also in summer, *know* how to value and enjoy such blessings! Nevertheless England was *home* to our heroine, in spite of its gloomy skies and weeping clouds, and she tried hard to induce the Prince to spend a few months there again, or let her do so with her baby. Either plan suited him not; "he could not afford it then, another year, perhaps;" and the following summer a fresh excuse was found. Poor Helen! it was a sad disappointment; the Mowbrays and Selwoods kept on writing and begging her to visit them, and what reason could she give for resisting their entreaties?

Little Marie grew daily more loving and loveable; she was a sweet fairy child, with her mother's sunny curls and beautiful eyes. Even Castelbianco grew fond of her, though her sex was a great mortification to him;

but as he now lived in hopes of a son and heir, he could afford to smile, and occasionally play with his little daughter. She lisped her mother's tongue prettily enough, and chattered to her father in his rough Neapolitan, till Helen wondered how such a tiny mouth could frame words so uncouth, though even they sounded sweetly from those smiling lips.

The Princess doated on her little one, and saw with dread the time approaching when she would be transformed into a Neapolitan young lady. A foreign Roman Catholic governess would rob the mother of her charge; she foresaw the child's quickness checked, her intelligence repressed, and the prospect filled her with grief and apprehension; she foresaw her darling taught by its father and by a hireling to distrust its mother; she foresaw her own child led on to worship saints and images, which to Helen was a sin and an abomination; she foresaw her child at the tender age of seven brought to confession to one of a class that she abhorred. Yet she had known this all along; before her marriage she had consented that her future sons, if not her daughters, should be elevated in another faith—why then did she feel it so keenly now? Because her heart then centred in an adoring lover, and she was not a mother; and it is only a mother who can realise the anguish of being robbed of her children's confidence and affection.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Princess had a sudden invasion of her domestic peace and comfort. Her sister-in-law, the Duchessa di Villanova, whom she had not yet seen, announced her intention of visiting the capital, in order to place two of her children at different colleges — the eldest girl at I. Miracoli, and a boy at the Royal Naval School.

As the family had not been to Naples for some years, there was to be a grand importation of the household, with all the bairns, because the Signora Duchessa resolved to make the most of the opportunity, and prolong her stay for some months. Her toilette required to be entirely renovated according to the latest fashions, and her children's young ideas were likewise to be furbished up by a change of governesses. Being of an economical disposition, though married to a rich man who saved a fortune annually by vegetating on his estates in the provinces, the lady determined to take up her quarters at the Palazzo Castelbianco, somewhere about the fifth or sixth floor, as her brother (who was equally careful of his own interests), would not sacrifice the letting of anything better. The Duchessa by this arrangement hoped and intended to profit by the Castelbianco drawing-room suite, which her near relationship would enable her to claim almost as her home.

All this put the Prince in a fearful fit of ill-humour.

"Why couldn't Checchina* find some other apartment for herself and her large family? Why worry him? Did she look upon the property as hers, and come to boast of her stupid ugly boys, and taunt him with his own useless girl? Ah! well she would soon find out her mistake when she saw a son born into his family!"

This was a terribly sore subject to poor Gaetano, whose jealousy of his sister strengthened with the birth of each of her sons. At the lady's marriage, her husband had been invested with one of the family titles, which contented him instead of a large fortune, while his wife, in right of her rank and condescension in allying herself to a provincial family, lorded it over the good man, and made him constantly feel his own insignificance in the household.

It may sound strange to English ears that Castalbiano should give a dukedom to his brother-in-law, while his own heir would only be Marchese di Villanova; but such contradictions are of daily occurrence among the Neapolitans. The heads of families retain for themselves and eldest sons the *oldest titles* they possess, while those of more recent date are suffered to be borne by other members of the house, or are bestowed with the daughters' hands on their marrying. Thus a Prince will be the son of a Marquis, a Duke heir to a Count; and as there is no printed peerage similar to ours, the confusion this occasions to foreigners is inconceivable.

It may be readily supposed that Helen did not anticipate any great pleasure from the coming visit, and fully coincided in her husband's views on the subject, though it was not for her to give utterance to such sentiments. Castalbiano would have been ready enough

* Short for Francesca.

to turn round upon and reproach her with a want of natural feeling towards him and his family, ill nature, unamiability, and a host of other substantives of similar import. She resolved to try and like her new sister-in-law, though she was by this time too well acquainted with Neapolitan character to be as sanguine in her expectations as she had been when anticipating the introduction to the old Principessa her mother-in-law. She wondered a good deal how so large a family would find room in the small apartment prepared for them, and therefore ventured to suggest to the Prince the desirableness of giving them a larger suite.

"Oh! per bacco, if Checchina is not satisfied she may look out for herself elsewhere. I can't afford to turn out half a dozen families to suit her convenience."

So his wife in her quiet way tried to make the small dark rooms look as comfortable as she could, and felt very much ashamed of the miserable figure they presented after all her plannings and contrivings.

"If you please, my lady," said Jones, "I would not distress myself about it; for these Neapolitans aint a bit like we English. The Prince, I dare say, knows quite well what they'll want."

And Jones was quite right after all. Well, at last the Duca and Duchessa arrived, with six children—two boys and four girls, the youngest of the latter, an ugly, sickly child of a year old, being accompanied by its wet nurse. There were likewise two maids, and of all things in the world—a respectable English governess.

Helen could hardly credit the evidence of her eyes, for the whole set out by no means warranted such an *etcetera*, and she wondered what adverse fate could have driven any lady to undertake the charge of such vulgar *hopeless-looking* pupils!

The Duchessa was tall and large with an overpowering voice and a ceaseless tongue, which after half an hour's chatter gave Helen a severe headache, and produced an utter depression of spirits. The husband was a fat bloated man, bearing evident signs in his puffy cheeks of a relish for maccaroni and oil, while his voice had a thick, unctuous sound, strongly suggestive of a full habit of body.

Checchina gave Helen a noisy salute on either cheek, which she afterwards patted, calling her a "bella ragazza" and turning at the same moment to the Duca for his affirmative opinion. This he readily gave, and then kissed Helen's hand, when she perceived that his face was uncomfortably warm, and longed exceedingly to be able unobserved to wipe her fingers!

Her sister-in-law turned to address Castelbianco, while the husband drew forth a couple of handkerchiefs — a coloured one for service, which was shortly replaced in his pocket, and a white one with which the sufferer deliberately mopped his face and head, puffing and wheezing desperately during the process.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed with a prolonged gasp, half sigh, half groan; then turning to his hostess, "Fa molto caldo! *sono tutto sudato — sino alla camicia!*"

A few years before Helen would have been surprised at such an address, but delicacy quickly dies out at Naples: so she now merely compassionated her visitor's sufferings, and offered refreshments.

"Grazie*, but if the Signor Principe will lend me a clean shirt to change?"

"Subito!" and summoning Gaetano she begged him to satisfy their friend's wants, inwardly marvelling how

* *Grazie*, when employed alone, commonly implies the negation, "no, thanks."

the fat Duca was to don a vestment of the slender Principe!

Castelbianco looked very black, but desiring the Duca to follow, these very dissimilar brothers quitted the room together.

Then Helen had to admire and kiss her uncouth nephews and nieces all round, while they, after staring at her exceedingly, began with one accord to assault their mother, crying, begging and whining for all kinds of possible and impossible things. The Duchessa alternately kissed, soothed, and scolded, now pointing out the beauties of one promising daughter, and anon cuffing another, exclaiming despairingly,

“’Ste creature mi fanno perdere la testa!”

Helen thought of her own gentle little Minette with intense thankfulness.

After the Princess had admired the unwholesome-looking baby, which she with difficulty brought herself to kiss, the Duchessa told the wet nurse and other maids to take the children upstairs. Then “confusion worse confounded” prevailed for some ten minutes; the younger brats kicking and squalling in strong disapprobation of the plan, the bigger ones turning sulky, and merely vouchsafing an indignant toss of the head in sign of their decided refusal to obey. The servants’ voices rose loudly above the storm, and the unhappy governess tried equally in vain to reason her pupils into compliance. At length the wet nurse, carrying the baby, seized another hopeful by the wrist, and dragged her away screaming, and at the same moment the return of the father brought his persuasive powers to the rescue. Taking the youngest boy in his arms, and covering him with loud kisses, he coaxed the rest to follow, the mother assuring them with a wink at the

Princess that she was coming directly; the governess and maids brought up the rear, and a comparative calm succeeded the storm,—only *comparative*, because the Duchess's voice and her fire of questions, in the purest vernacular, would have tried stronger nerves than Helen's. How old she was, when she was going to become a *Christian*, how many children she had, and other similar interrogatories, not to mention a countless number relative to the various articles of dress she wore, where this was made, what that cost, &c.

Donna Checchina saw no reason for shyness towards a brother's wife, and though to strangers she would have been on her best behaviour, she regarded Helen as legitimate spoil, and was quite delighted at finding such novel food for her curiosity.

Little Marie was in due time introduced for inspection, and though rather startled by her new aunt's warm embraces and approval, still contrived to look tolerably composed, as she felt her mamma's protecting arm round her tiny form. Her large eyes gazed inquiringly at the stranger, who went into raptures of admiration at her beauty, dress, and winning manners. But when the fat uncle returned, wheezing and puffing, took her on one of his substantial knees, inclosed one of the miniature hands in his own brown palm, and tried to get a kiss, the rosy lips were ominously contracted, and a watery climax seemed imminent, till Helen, with a would-be frown, opportunely said, "Minnette must behave prettily to papa's brother."

Then the small face grew tranquil, and the big, rough caresses were submitted to as an inevitable evil.

The Princess,

"On hospitable cares intent,"

had provided a dinner for the Duchess's children with

her own darling, who did not take at all kindly to her unruly cousins. The Duca and Duchessa, with the elder boy and girls, and their governess Miss Eden, were to dine with the heads of the family.

When the little ones were at table, Helen accompanied their mother to look at them, and she quickly remarked Jones's and the nurse's pursed-up mouths, as they scornfully eyed the strangers, while Minette's violet orbs were so lost in astonishment at the improprieties she witnessed, that she quite forgot to eat her own food.

The new comers were evidently bent on devouring as large a portion of the viands set before them at as great a speed as they could. The macaroni, heaped in soup plates, was sucked up in marvellous style, and Helen longed to laugh heartily at the strange scene presented to her sight: Jones and the nurse looking so disgusted at the whole proceeding, Minette so wonder-struck, the strangers so greedy, and the Duchessa so full of maternal anxiety for the appetites of her brood. Verily, Helen's good manners were sorely tried. Yet the parlour company, on the whole, was not much more refined. Don Dominico, on this occasion, formed one of the guests, and got on wonderfully well with the Duca during the intervals between the courses, while Castelbianco exerted himself to appear amiable, and his sister saved everybody the trouble of finding subjects of conversation.

Helen greatly compassionated Miss Eden the governess, to whom she was studiously kind and polite; not that she noticed any neglect towards her, but she divined how miserable the poor creature must feel in such distasteful company. The Neapolitans, to do them justice, are always marked in their courtesy to governesses, a race too often scorned and ill-treated in

our enlightened country ; yet this poor gentlewoman— for such she evidently was — must have suffered daily martyrdom from the vulgarities she witnessed in her employers. Father, mother, and children were intent on their plates, and displayed the most insatiable appetites, with utter disregard to conventionalities. Then, owing doubtless to their long residence away from the capital, the dress of the children was so extravagantly smart and vulgar, and at the same time so old fashioned, that they presented the most ridiculous appearance ; Miss Eden, in her grave simplicity and quiet manners, shone like a queen beside the others.

Country cousins at Naples are very much like the same genus elsewhere, and their fondness for gay colours and rubbish of all sorts is equally conspicuous. Poor Helen felt intensely ashamed of her new relations ; she wondered whether they would ever be polished up in civilised society ; and whether she might suggest to her sister-in-law the propriety of discarding certain yellow bonnets the girls wore on arrival, as also that of shortening the long frilled *unmentionables* that hung down over their heels.

The Duchessa who had not thought fit to clean herself—as the servants say—for dinner, but still wore her travelling gear, was more presentable, because plainer dressed than her daughters, while the husband at the time he comforted himself with one of the Prince's *camicie*, donned a kind of loose jacket, which made his corpulent figure look supremely ridiculous.

"Signora Principessa," he said, "mi permettete, ma qua' stiamo tutti in famiglia, non è vero ?"

"Oh ! già ; s' intende !" interposed his wife.

Helen inclined her head silently, and then caught a mischievous glance from Castelbianco, who well know-

ing how "Elena's English fidgets" would be shocked by such improprieties, was greatly diverted at the scene. *He* had conceded the point of dressing for dinner in the early sunshiny days of their married life, and when his English wife became mistress of the household on the old Princess's death, everything was conducted so neatly, that he felt ashamed to be wanting on his part, though really greatly preferring the Neapolitan free and easy mode of enjoying existence.

On the whole, when night came, and Helen at a very late hour was rid of her guests, and free to lay her aching head on her pillow, she concluded that this had been one of the most trying days she had ever gone through!

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER a lengthened withdrawal of the sunshine of its august presence from its faithful capital, the Court awoke this Carnival from its slumbers, and signified its determination to indulge the Neapolitans with several balls at the Palace.

The Duchessa di Villanova was in high glee at the prospect, so were her countrymen and countrywomen; everybody in short, all nations and languages, except — *the English*.

“Why so?” cries the reader in amazement. “Are we not as dance-loving as our neighbours over the water? are we not fond of balls, and *Court* balls too, which dancers don’t get every day of their lives.

‘Oh! ’tis sweet!’

to trip it

‘On the light fantastic toe.’”

Very true; nevertheless, all were put sorely out of countenance on this occasion: some turned sulky and silent; others philosophical, and above the follies of the age; others, again ridiculed both dancers and philosophers, declaring it was the best joke they had ever known. Ferdinand II. issued invitations for the first ball for a *Sunday* evening.

Who among the English would attend; and who would stay away? It was a slight to them, an intentional affront; but his Majesty should not be deprived

of their company; they would wait till the clock struck midnight, and so make their appearance on Monday morning!

Checchina in the excitement about her own toilette left her sister-in-law no peace of mind till she had given her advice, and accompanied her to milliners and dressmakers, but this weighty matter satisfactorily settled, she vouchsafed to question Helen relative to *her* dress.

"I am not going to this ball," was the quiet reply, "and I have not thought about futurity."

"Not going to the ball?"

The Duchessa almost shrieked as she echoed Helen's words, and then remained staring at her in genuine astonishment, really believing her mind must be wandering.

Helen laughed.

"E la ragione perchè! You are not ill, Elena, and this is the first ball Sua Maestà has given for, oh! tanti anni."

"Yes, I know; but English people do not go to balls on Sunday nights."

"Ma perchè?" persisted the Duchessa, still with staring eyes.

"It is not the custom with Protestants;" and then changing the conversation Helen tried to start another subject, but in vain, for Checchina could not realise the fact of any one refusing to go to a Court ball.

Castelbianco now made his appearance, and his wife's heart died within her. She dreaded the violent opposition he would offer, and the manner in which his sister would communicate the unwelcome intelligence; in fact, the Duchessa delayed not an instant in telling him that Elena was not going to the ball.

"What is the reason? Are you ill?" turning to Helen, in sudden alarm as to his future prospects.

"Oh no, Gaetano, I am quite well; but I would rather remain at home that night."

"Ma perchè!" he inquired, as his sister had done before him.

"Because it takes place on a Sunday, she says," interrupted the Duchessa, "what does she mean?"

"Ugh! pazzie!" was the contemptuous reply.

Helen said nothing, though the Duchessa would not let the matter rest in spite of her imploring looks. Castelbianco was searching for something he had missed, and was apparently in haste, but he stopped for a moment opposite Helen, and said,—

"What will Sua Maestà say? And you honoured by being appointed one of the ladies of the Court."

"Dear Gaetano, one night cannot signify; and there will be other balls it is said. I shall not be missed."

"Fate come volete—you are as obstinate as a mule! Only if matters go wrong, remember, you won't be the only sufferer, it will all fall on my unlucky head!" and away he hurried, leaving his wife almost incredulous of having got over that difficulty so easily.

The Duchessa argued the point with the Princess for a while longer, but meeting with no success, finally desisted; and in a few days her own mind was too much occupied with domestic troubles to bestow further thought on her eccentric sister-in-law.

It has been said that one of the Duchessa's reasons for visiting the capital, was to provide an instructress for her children, who should return with them into the provinces. Miss Eden had vexed and surprised her employer, by signifying a desire to resign her charge.

into other hands, and not all the lady's offers of increased emolument served to change her resolution.

Checchina expressed her astonishment to Helen.

"Why should *Mees* want to leave us? I pay her immensamente, 360 ducati* l'anno. She lives with us quite in famiglia; has these blessed belle ragazze of mine (you don't know, Elena, how clever they are!) for pupils, and she is *my* companion. What does she want more?"

"You treat her kindly, there is no doubt," answered her listener, "but perhaps she dislikes staying in the provinces, the climate may disagree with her." She knew not what else to say, though she felt that the attractions the Duchessa had named could by no means balance the *disagreeables* of the situation. She only marvelled how Miss Eden could ever have been tempted by it, and then Helen sighed; for had she not also viewed the prospect of a Neapolitan ménage through rose-tinted glasses?

The Duchessa, notwithstanding the ill success that had attended her first attempt, was still determined to get another English governess; it was the correct thing to do; and besides, she felt that such a personage was more trustworthy than one of her own nation. Checchina was very proud of her children's proficiency in speaking English, and had even learnt to read it herself, after a fashion, as she proved one day exultingly, to Helen, by catching up a book, and gabbling over a page at a hand gallop, without regard to commas, colons, or full stops. Then she looked up for the expected applause, and received it with conscious pride, though Helen's breath had been so taken away by the torrent of

* Sixty pounds.

words, and she was so diverted withal, that her commendations were, she feared, very tame. But her relation was too well satisfied with herself to value, or need the opinion of others, so Helen's faint praise was not regarded as a failure, although —

“To commend, without desert,
Requires a mastery of art,
That set's a glass on what's amiss.
And says what should be, not what is.”

English governesses are certainly to be found at Naples by the native families; but it is no easy matter, as the religion is always a stumbling-block; and to their praise be it said, few qualified individuals are willing to make the required recantation of their errors, as the *premier pas*. The instances are few and far between in which Protestants have been employed, a circumstance that is quite natural, but hence there remains a very limited number of persons to choose from, and their language is not always *Queen's English*.

The Duchessa was at last satisfied that her troubles were ended, and came to Helen with a radiant countenance, to announce the successful termination of her search.

“*Mees Smith*, è una bella ragazza, molto simpatica, a good Christian and assai istruita! You will be sure to like her, Elena; she has more vivacità than that stupid cold creature who is leaving us.”

“Where has she lived before?” asked Helen, reserving her congratulations.

“Oh! con tante *miladi*, but she comes to me from the Principessa di S——.”

“Had I not better see her? As she is my country-woman, I might judge by her manners and language,

more readily than you would, what sort of a person she really is."

"Oh! her manners I tell you are charming; and Ninetta (the second daughter) says she speaks better than *Mees*, louder—via, con più spirito!"

This was a doubtful virtue in Helen's opinion, but she did not press the offer of her services, since Ninetta was esteemed so excellent a judge.

"Besides, I closed with mademoiselle immediately," pursued the Duchessa. "I was delighted to get any one so different to our melancholy *Mees*!"

So there was no more to be said, for it was evidently *un fait accompli*.

Before taking her departure, Miss Eden requested an interview with the Princess, which was readily granted. It was to solicit her assistance as a countrywoman, in procuring another situation. The Duchessa having given her an excellent testimonial, she begged the Princess to remember her, if she knew of any family requiring the services of a resident governess.

Miss Eden was neither young, pretty nor fascinating, but she was quiet and lady-like, and the Princess's heart always warmed towards an English woman, so she answered her in all kindness, promising to do her best to aid her, and mentioning the name of an acquaintance, who she believed was desirous of meeting with a lady to instruct one little girl.

"You would have a quieter time in that house, I should think, Miss Eden;" said the Princess with a smile. "You must have found your present charges very troublesome, I fear?"

"The trouble, Madame la Princesse, would have been more than repaid had I seen any improvement in my pupils, or *desire* on their part, to second my efforts;

but I confess it has been most discouraging to me to witness my utter failure. Indeed," she added, with some hesitation, colouring as she spoke, "I feel a delicacy in soliciting your kind patronage, when you have no better evidences of my management than the children of Madame la Duchesse!"

"Nay, Miss Eden, I acquit you of all blame in this matter, and can quite understand your feelings, I assure you. A governess must be more than mortal, who unsupported by the parents, could humanise such children!"

Miss Eden looked most grateful for such considerate words. Poor lady! she had so long toiled up the hill of difficulty single-handed, lacking sympathy, and meeting with disappointments at every turn, that now a word of kindness was a balm to her wearied spirit.

"You are very good," was all she could say, but her eyes filled with tears.

"Have you been long in this country?" asked Helen, anxious to give her companion an opportunity of speaking openly about herself, if she desired it.

"Three years. I came here originally with an English family, which I was obliged to quit from ill health. I had a tedious fever, and as they could not await my recovery, business requiring their presence in England at a stated time, they were compelled to leave me behind. They behaved very liberally and kindly to me, and we were mutually sorry to part, but the doctors gave them no prospect of my rallying. However, I did recover, and being a Roman Catholic by birth, and desirous on account of my health to continue some time longer in a mild climate, I sought an engagement in a Neapolitan house. This I readily obtained, in fact, many private attempts had been made by *noble families*

to induce me to leave Mrs.—— to all which I naturally turned a deaf ear, though another governess, an acquaintance of mine, suffered herself to be tempted by the offer of a higher salary to desert a kind mistress.”

“Such underhand proceedings sound strange to English ears,” said Helen, “but I am aware that they are often practised at Naples. Great have been the allurements held out to my English maid, but she has continued faithful to me.”

“She ought to be so, and would bitterly repent her folly, were she ever induced to enter a thoroughly Neapolitan family! The very people who succeeded in getting the person of whom I spoke, proved so; I was going to say *disreputable*, only they are very fashionable—so *gay*, that my poor friend was soon as anxious to quit their house as before she had been as eager to enter it.”

“Ah! very likely. I hope you were less unfortunate, Miss Eden?”

“In that way, yes, Madame la Princesse. I was engaged by Madame ——, and treated well, because the Neapolitans are always considerate towards their governesses; but the establishment was so utterly comfortless, that I could not remain. You know, Madame, that we English are used to keep up the decencies of life. Luxuries can be readily dispensed with, but those small every-day proprieties that make life pleasant, and without which it is almost unendurable, are hard to part with. My poor father was a gentleman, and strove to give his daughter the feelings of his class; perhaps he was wrong, for these very tastes—prejudices if you like, have unfitted me to become reconciled to a Neapolitan home.”

“I can believe it,” answered the Princess sadly, “but

do not regret your English ideas of refinement, though they are perhaps out of place in this country. Unso-phisticated nature, as it is too often presented to one here, does not at all recommend itself to my taste. *Les bienséances* were never fully comprehended by me, nor admired, till I daily saw them dispensed with, and now I rather dread flying to the other extreme. I fear, however, that you did not change for the better Miss Eden, when you quitted Madame —— for my sister-in-law's house?"

Poor Miss Eden found herself in a dilemma. How enter into particulars about the Duchessa to her own relative? True, she was addressing an Englishwoman, but it was one who had allied herself to Neapolitans, and could no longer be regarded as separate from them. While she was thus debating with herself how to reply, the Princess laughingly relieved her embarrassment.

"It was not a fair question perhaps, but believe me, I retain my English feelings so thoroughly, that I can see very well the *désagréments* of that *ménage*. The Duchessa di Villanova is very good-natured, and fully appreciates your good qualities, but I do not wonder at your desire to look out for other pupils. Shall I speak to Madame de Meudon? I think you will like both her and her pretty little girl."

"You are too kind, Madame la Princesse, I am most grateful."

"Very well, then, that is settled, and as this lady is French I hope she will be able to make you more comfortable than you have been hitherto among Neapolitans."

After a few more remarks on either side, Miss Eden took her leave with a lightened heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE first Court ball was in due time numbered with the past, and Helen was commiserated by her sister-in-law and all her native acquaintances for having been kept away from it through a mere scruple. Checchina had taken care to inform her friends about the Princess's English fancies, and all made a point of questioning her on the subject whenever they met. "Was it true that she was not going to the ball? What was the reason? What harm was there in dancing on a Sunday night?"

Helen was rather provoked with them, and much vexed by her husband's sneers, but she submitted to both as patiently as she could, and shortly the announcement of a *bal costumé* filled every head with new thoughts and suffered her to sink into insignificance. The prospect of this entertainment did not delight her very much, for she no longer had the light spirits necessary for masquerading, and moreover now perceived a settled, anxious frown on her husband's brow which often filled her with apprehension. Even the Duchessa remarked her brother's gloom, and went so far as to tax him with it; but he answered her curiosity with such a sharp retort "to mind her own business!" that a wordy warfare ensued between them, which sent Helen to seek shelter and peace in her own room.

About this time also she noticed that Castelbianco

never went out riding, nay, he often honoured her with his cheerful company during her drives. At first she endeavoured to find subjects of conversation, but getting only monosyllabic replies for her pains, she relapsed into silence; and so this wretched, ill-assorted couple, added one more to the many that might have been seen taking their daily drive on the Chiaja, the gentleman looking out at one side of the carriage and the lady at the other.

But even this questionable sort of sociability came to an end, for one day that Helen was driving through the town accompanied by the Duchessa, her carriage was suddenly stopped in the Largo del Castello by some men, and she was requested to alight.

Indignantly she inquired the reason of such an insult, and bade the coachman drive on; but the man shook his head dubiously, though gathering up the reins in obedience to her orders. Then Checchina's voice broke out loud and shrill, the servants joined in chorus, and every one had something to say in the emergency; but nobody attended to Helen's request to be heard. She could not comprehend the torrent of patois which the speakers poured forth,—could not understand the cause of the disturbance, and was only painfully conscious that a crowd had gathered round the carriage, and that a row even was impending between her servants and the dirty strangers who had stopped their progress.

At length some soldiers from the adjoining guard-house appeared on the scene, accompanied by an officer. The latter quieted the noise, and examined into the matter, and during the lull Helen got the Duchessa to answer her repeated questions, and learnt that the carriage and horses were seized for debt.

It was a terrible shock. The poor girl was ready

to sink into the earth with shame at such a catastrophe — she who had been so early instilled with a horror of debt, large or small. Then too such a public *esclandre* she thought everybody was jeering at her — that the occupants of every passing carriage in that crowded thoroughfare must be talking of her husband's spend-thrift ways!

"Let us get out; for heaven's sake, Checchina, let us escape from this mob!" And the poor thing was almost crying with vexation.

But the Duchessa would not be so easily persuaded, and began to talk louder than before, with genuine Neapolitan fluency.

Helen appealed to the officer, and inquired whether she might not drive home?

"Signora Principessa, I fear you must descend; the man has a claim on the property, *c'è poco da fare!*"

And so she got out, followed by the Duchessa, storming at the top of her shrill voice. The servant had summoned a hack-carriage — happily a closed one — and into this poor Helen rushed for concealment, and immediately burst into tears.

She only saw the disgrace; but her sister-in-law was furious at a noble receiving summary treatment from one of the *canaille*.

Whoever heard of such a thing! Take away the Principe di Castelbianco's carriage and horses in the public street! Insult a noble that fashion! Gaetano must appeal against it to Sua Maestà."

"You forget Checchina," said Helen irritably, provoked by her ceaseless noise, "that this is for a heavy debt. Sua Maestà will not be likely to take our part against all law and justice."

"Bah! what has *justice* to do with it? Gaetano is

a noble, and Sua Maestà always supports us. This *insolente* dare not touch his person, and I wonder he is not afraid to seize his property. The fellow ought to feel proud of being patronised by the Prince; what a notion you have about *justice*! Only the other day you sided with that good-for-nothing footman I discharged, and tried to dissuade me from cautioning all my acquaintances against ever taking him into their service. You said it would ruin him perhaps for life — *ebbene*, and what matter? We Neapolitans always act thus if a servant offend us. Do we not stand by each other in everything, and does not the King likewise defend our dignity as he ought to do? To be sure Sua Maestà will punish this miscreant for his insolence!"

Helen said nothing in answer to this tirade, she was too shame-stricken and miserable.

They reached home, and the Duchessa, followed more slowly by his sister, hastened to find the Prince, and recount the recent event, but beyond uttering some words that will not bear writing, he betrayed no great surprise.

"Gaetano," cried his sister, "you will get the fellow punished for this?"

"How am I to get him punished?"

"Will you submit tamely to having your wife turned out of her carriage in the public street by such a *scele-rato*?"

"My saddle-horses have gone long ago, and therefore she need not grumble!"

"Dear Gaetano," cried his wife with swimming eyes, "I do not grumble. I neither want carriages nor horses; believe me, I am both willing and anxious to retrench in any way you will point out."

"Oh! as to that *c'è tempo ancora*."

"But what will you and Elena do without carriages or horses?" persisted the Duchessa, who could not see how existence would be possible under such circumstances.

"*Andremo per la posta de' cani*.* Many a noble lady in Naples has to do that, so Elena will have good company to keep her in countenance."

"Ah! and who may she thank for that?" began the angry lady; and thereupon the brother and sister had a prolonged argument and difference of opinion.

The entrance of the Duca di Villanova made a diversion. He, good-natured, fat man did his best to appease the combatants, and each being glad to gain a listener (Helen having slipped away), the quarrel was lost sight of in their mutual desire to narrate the morning's adventure. Afterwards, when the lady left them, the two gentlemen talked over as much of his difficulties as Castalbiano thought might bear the light of day; then he tried diplomatically to touch the Duca's heart and loose his purse-strings, and even hazarded a modest request for a loan.

"Amico mio," said the Duca, "farò il mio possibile, though you are mistaken in thinking me rich!"

The Prince got a little ready money from his relation, a few hundred ducats, which were like rain drops in mid ocean, and consequently were only employed in partially settling one or two of his so-called *debts of honour*. Were ever words so perverted? Yet Castalbiano, and many heroes of his stamp, consider themselves gentlemen in every sense of the word, and are rather proud than otherwise of the said *debts of honour*. And so carriages and horses were suppressed, and

* On foot.

Helen, when she in time summoned up courage to show herself out of doors, either went, as her husband elegantly phrased it, "*per la posta de' cani*," or treated herself, like most other Neapolitan ladies afflicted with gay husbands, to a hired vehicle.

The Prince sauntered about the streets nonchalantly enough, smoking every minute of the day to drown thought, or else he got a lift on a friend's drag, and thus endeavoured to enjoy, with as light a heart as he could muster, the *dolce far niente* of a Neapolitan's existence.

One morning, about a week after these occurrences, Helen sat in her boudoir *thinking* (a very bad thing to do, reader, unless you have something pleasant to think about). Minette occupied a low stool at her mother's feet, and was hard at work trying to master the intricate spelling of words of two syllables. She whispered them over to herself with a little frown on her fair brow, and occasionally looked up at her mamma's face hoping to obtain assistance; then seeing her preoccupied countenance, she would turn again to her labours with a weary sigh.

The silence was at last broken by Jones, who opened the door with a beaming face, fraught with important tidings. This fact quick-witted Marie perceived at once, and her little frown was smoothed away instantaneously, and her large eyes opened wide in expectation; but Helen's thoughts were otherwise engaged, and she did not turn her head.

"If you please, my lady, —" a pause.

"What is it, Jones?" was asked languidly enough.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, my lady!"

"I desired François to deny me to visitors this morning, why has he not done so?"

"But, my lady, this is not exactly a visitor."

There was something in Jones's voice which made her mistress look up quickly, and ask hurriedly, "Who is it?"

Oh! my lady, it is ——"

But she was interrupted by a cheery voice answering "An old friend!"

"Oh! dear Uncle John!" and in a minute Helen was clasped in Sir John Selwood's arms, while Marie's eyes opened to their fullest extent at the sight.

"What a surprise, dear uncle!"

"Ah! I wanted to surprise my little Helen, so I wouldn't let them write you a note of preparation from home. But is this little Helen the second?" And the kindly Baronet caught up the amazed Minette in his arms.

"Have you ever heard of Uncle John, little puss?"
Minette nodded.

"Well then, I am Uncle John! Will you give me one or two kisses? I promise you I will pay them back very honestly."

Minette, imprisoned as she was by those stout arms, had nevertheless tried to keep as far away as she could from possible contact with the round cheerful face that beamed upon her. Her rosy lips were screwed up quite tight at first, but only at first, for who could long resist Uncle John? then they gradually relaxed into a smile, and finally were pouted out ready for a give-and-take kissing match, which forthwith took place to Helen's intense delight.

But Sir John had no intention of releasing his captive. Sitting down beside Helen on a sofa, and tenderly holding one of her small hands, with his other arm he kept Marie on his knee and gave her a hug at stray intervals.

"And now, little woman," said her uncle, when matters were thus pleasantly arranged, "set to work and ply me with questions, for I see by your eyes that you are longing to do so."

"Papa and mamma?"

"Both well; Mowbray is as hearty and active as ever, trotting about on his white pony, and keeping every one to his work; and your dear mother is also in good health for her, though forced to take care of herself for all our sakes. But Naples is too far off to allow her to come out here again, therefore we must see and arrange a half-way house of meeting, because she has been a long time without seeing her child!"

"Poor mamma!" and Helen's lips quivered.

"And Mr. Hill, how is he?" she asked, after a pause.

"He has grown very old, and has given up doing any duty; but he is quite hale and cheerful, and his venerable head is beautiful with its snowy locks. He is as much loved as ever he was, though his curate finds favour likewise with the parishioners. This is a good energetic young man, just the person one needs in these rousing times. Your school flourishes under his superintendence, and all the old women think him a prodigy. By the way, speaking of old women, I must not forget how many kind messages your faithful nurse sent to her 'dear Miss Helen.'"

"Dear old nurse," exclaimed Helen, "what a true-hearted creature she is! How she would like to see Minette, would she not, uncle?"

"Ay, that she would! Shall I take Missy back with me to let old nurse have a peep at those golden curls?"

"If mamma go too," was the whispered reply.

"To be sure, mamma shall go along with us; quite right to remember that, pussycat. Nurse has a tidy little maid to look after her now, and I think her weightiest care is the reflection that her darling has married one of 'the dark people with curly hair.' She gets nicely teased by Mowbray, sometimes, for that unlucky speech of hers, ha! ha!"

And thus they chatted happily about home and friends, and old bygone times and scenes, till a shadow fell on Sir John's genial brow, and his voice slightly trembled.

"Yes, Helen dear, *she* loved you very much. I wish she could have seen you again ere it pleased God to take her to Himself. I could not bear the old Hall after her death; it looked so dreary and desolate without a mistress, so at last they all persuaded me to seek a change of scene for some months, and I determined to come to you, darling."

Helen pressed her hand in sympathy.

"My poor aunt was always so kind to me, and I loved her very much; I have not forgotten her, dear uncle."

"Poor Mary, it is nearly a year now since she died."

Minette's eyes bore such evident signs of coming tears from sympathy, that Helen made her run and see if her papa were at home, and bid him come to Uncle John.

Castelbianco was out, but when he returned he professed great pleasure at meeting his old acquaintance, and was altogether so polite and amiable, that his wife hardly recognised him, though she was very thankful for the welcome he extended to so near and dear a relation of hers.

Sir John Selwood noticed with regret the change in Helen's appearance ; for instead of the blooming bride from whom he had last parted, he now saw a care-worn delicate looking woman. Since the Mowbrays' visit to Naples, he had modified his early enthusiastic opinions of Castelbianco, and his great desire to visit that city, next to his wish to see Helen herself, was that he might be able to look after her and judge how the Prince comported himself towards her.

Now, apparently, Castelbianco was amiability personified, and Sir John earnestly hoped this would stand the test of time ; yet when he observed his darling niece's pale, thin face, his heart misgave him sorely.

Sir John's genial manners captivated the Duchessa at once, and some well-turned compliments made her his staunch ally. The Duca came puffing with outstretched, greasy paw, to utter a long speech about the *onore e piacere* it was to make the acquaintance of such a *nobile Cavaliere*. The Baronet duly admired the children, and even kissed the youngest ; immediately after which ceremony, he took Minette captive and rewarded himself for doing his duty, by feasting on her rosy lips and cheeks. These two soon became great friends, the older child relating long marvellous tales, and the younger sitting perched on his knee listening to them open-mouthed, till some *extra extra-vaganza* called forth a warning, incredulous, " Oh ! Uncle John ! "

One morning Marie ran to her uncle on his making his appearance, to show a new toy that had been given to her. It was a wooden nun with nodding head, whose dress, on being opened, disclosed a little chapel, containing an altar and kneeling figure.

Sir John admired it, and wondered properly when

the petticoats were unfastened ; then turning to Helen who was present, he said,—“ This nun reminds me of one of my fellow-passengers on board the packet, a good-natured talkative Englishman. As we steamed into the beautiful bay, he knowing Naples well, commented on the buildings that covered the hills and lined the coast, and also pointed out to me a convent where he said a relation of his was for some time immured, a countrywoman of ours——

“ Miss Harford ? ” asked Helen.

“ Yes ; that was the name. Do you know anything of her ? ”

“ Oh ! I have often seen both her and her poor mother, even before they entered the convent.”

“ Then you know her history perhaps ? I thought I should have had such a charming romance of real life to relate for your gratification.”

“ Mrs. Harford herself told me most of the particulars attending her daughter’s perversion. I used to visit the mother at the convent, but when the poor lady died I went no more, as the nun evidently did not like *heretics*.”

“ Ah ! then, perhaps, you don’t know her *finale* after all ? ”

“ No ; what do you mean ? ”

“ Why, my informant, who said he was her nearest relation, told me that she literally pined herself to death ; she was so miserable in the convent.”

“ Oh ! Uncle John, how dreadful ! But she was so enthusiastic, and even rummaged up all the obsolete rules of the order, and had them re-established ; she was almost looked upon as a saint by the other inmates of the convent.”

“ Very likely ; but enthusiasm does not always last

you know, and this unhappy creature lost all hers, and only longed for her freedom once more. Well, she got it at length poor soul: the great liberator of us all unlocked her prison doors about six months ago;" and then Sir John indulged in some forcible diatribes on convents in general, while Helen sat shocked and grieved at Miss Harford's melancholy end, reproaching herself for never having visited her since the mother's death.

"You are sure, uncle, that the poor thing is dead? I might go to the convent this very day and inquire."

"No need, dear; this gentleman who bore the same name, knew well that she died six months ago, because he was written to on the subject of her illness, and started immediately to come here, but when he arrived Miss Harford was already dead. He went to the convent and made every inquiry about her."

"But surely none of the nuns told him that Sister Agatha had been so miserable?"

"No, no; catch any of them speaking out. Sister Agatha (was that her name?) told him the truth herself when he saw her once on some business, and they chanced to be left alone for a few minutes. He said it turned him quite sick to hear her, and he did not look like a very tender-hearted individual either. But come, cheer up, little woman, I ought not to have told you such a dismal story." Yet the kind Baronet had a tear in his own eye as he spoke, and he thereupon started a game of romps with little Minette to conceal his weakness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE night for the Royal *bal costumé* approached, and to Helen's surprise, and indeed vexation, her husband did not let his money difficulties stop his preparations for the event. She was ashamed of being tricked out in fancy finery in their present circumstances, but Castelbianco could not understand the feeling, and would allow of no hesitation on her part. Her going soon became imperative, for she was ordered to be in attendance on her Majesty on the night in question; her dress, of the time of the cavaliers, was likewise specified, as the Court party intended to open the ball with a quadrille in character.

Castelbianco had a hankering after a brigand costume, seeing which Sir John Selwood presented him with a costly brace of pistols, silver-mounted, and richly chased, which gratified the Neapolitan immensely.

"I have not forgotten the ladies either," he continued, presenting a small case to Helen, and another to Checchina.

Each contained an elegant bracelet, and only Helen's eyes, quickened by affection, would have noted that the workmanship of hers was rather more finished than the one given to Checchina. She thanked him warmly, much touched by his kindness, but the Duchessa, though full of admiration at the beauty of the trinket, exclaimed:—

"Ma, Signor Cavaliere, when you make me a present another time, pray give me the money instead!"*

"Oh, Checchina! cried Helen, both hurt for her uncle's sake, and amazed at her Neapolitan relative's cool effrontery.

"E perchè no? Then I might buy anything I wanted. But this bracelet is really exquisite, and I thank you very much, Signor Cavaliere."

Sir John was by this time laughing so immoderately at the plain speaking of the one lady, and the astonished gaze of the other, that he quitted the room in a hurry, conscious that he had no right to criticise other people's good manners.

The Prince would look his brigand character to perfection, with his dark hair and eyes and sallow skin. The costume consisted of a black velvet jacket, curiously braided and *patched* with blue, a high-peaked Calabrese hat, black velvet *shorts*, and leather gaiters. The mountaineers in lieu of stockings, envelope their feet in folds of linen, or rag, which are then bandaged up by sandals, fastened many times round the ankles and legs with leather thongs. A red sash round the waist held his pistols and a costly poignard, while a formidable rifle was slung by a strap from his shoulder. He excited great admiration among his friends, who never tired of examining and envying him his new acquisitions; thus our hero set care at defiance for a space, and resolved to enjoy himself at the approaching festival.

Sir John Selwood intended to content himself with his English court dress, while the Duca di Villanova's unwieldy figure, made an excellent Henry the Eighth. His wife donned some fancy costume.

* This remark was actually made to an English gentleman at Naples, on his presenting a cadeau to the Duchessa di N——.

On the night in question Helen's duties took her to the Palace at an earlier hour than the rest, who did not arrive till late, owing to the long file of carriages creeping up to the gate. That attained after an hour's patience, it took almost other sixty minutes to traverse the palace courts, from the incessant stoppages as each vehicle set down its freight. Ascending the handsome marble staircase, where soldiers kept guard on every landing, the party reached the first ante-room, which served also as a cloak room. Here the Gardes du Corps were on duty, a tantalising ordeal to those gay, dance-loving young nobles, whose evening entertainment was restricted to seeing all the rank and beauty of the land pass in review before their eyes.

Count Giulio was among the luckless ones, and stood on one side of the inner door, his companion being the Marchese di — ; both were friends of Castelbianco.

Checchina gave them a smile of recognition, as leaning on Sir John's arm, she passed on her way to the ball room, followed by Harry VIII., puffing more than ever from the unwonted excitement and exertion consequent on making his toilette. Castelbianco lingered a few minutes behind the others, to get the duplicate tickets of their cloaks ; and then, well satisfied with his finished *get up*, which showed off his good figure to the best advantage, he neared the door, smiling complacently at his friends, and ready with a joke at the expense of their vexatious employment, instead of their being able to join the dancers.

"Come vi pare?" he inquired, "Shall I do?"

"Non c'è male, parola!"

"Caspeto amico!" exclaimed Count Giulio. "You will frighten the women with those arms, not to hint at higher personages!"

Then other officers gathered round to comment and admire, and envy the lucky fellow, for having no duty to perform; till at last he strutted away gratified to his heart's content.

Our friends had missed the Royal quadrille, wherein all the dancers, as well as the bystanders were allowed to retain their hats. After this, the King uncovered; the signal for all assembled to follow his example.

"Well, Helen," said her uncle approaching her, "You look weary, little woman?"

"Yes, I am indeed tired of standing; and her Majesty has so seated herself that I am compelled to remain in this doorway, through which all the world is passing backwards and forwards."

"You must console yourself with reflecting on the high honour, &c."

"Poor comfort for aching legs," she answered.

"But where are the others?"

"I left the Duchessa, the centre of a little knot of critics, to whom she was exhibiting the *finimenti* of her dress. Harry the Eighth was showing off to his friends likewise. What a fool the man is to make such a guy of himself! And see, there is your husband, doesn't he look well to-night? He has promised to present me to the King, so perhaps he is coming for me."

Castelbianco joined them a minute after, and his wife's eyes brightened and her cheeks flushed with pleasure as she gazed at him. He saw it for a wonder; but then good humour always works miracles.

"Ti piace, bella mia?"

How seldom now he so addressed her!

"Davvero!" she answered with a sweet smile.

"You will fall in love with this handsome brigand a second time, Helen ! eh ?" said Sir John, laughing.

"Allons, mon cher ; come with me now and I will present you to his Majesty."

They went off together, leaving Helen to her weary watch. The ball afforded her but little pleasure, truly, though it was the first time she had attended one in those gorgeous mirrored halls. The myriad wax lights (which left their mark on many a coat and dress) made her eyes ache, standing fatigued her, especially placed as she was in a doorway, and pushed against by everybody. Yet the sight of her husband in his becoming costume recalled the memory of their old love days, and to-night his eyes had smiled upon her with some of their former expression, so these pleasant thoughts cheered her considerably. She tried to catch sight of him again, as she wished to see him approach the king.

At that instant the crowd before her separated a little, and she perceived Ferdinand II. standing in the middle of the ball-room and Castelfranco draw near him followed by her uncle. She saw the Prince about to kneel and kiss his Majesty's hand ; then suddenly start and his face turn very white. What could it be ? Helen bent forward ; and in her eagerness to obtain a better view pushed aside a Court chamberlain who was in her way ; then she could remark that the King was talking with knitted brows, that her husband looked abashed and frightened, while Sir John's face was flushed, and all the bystanders were closing round, to listen. This prevented her from seeing more, and she grew sick with apprehension : oh ! why did not her uncle come to tell her what had happened ?

She did not like to question chance acquaintances, and waited for some time in vain for information ; but

at length her sleeve was twitched from behind, and turning round she saw the Duchessa.

"Oh! Checchina, what has happened to Gaetano?"

"Zitto!" she whispered in answer. "Gaetano was about to kiss Sua Maestà's hand, and request permission to present il Signor Cavaliere, when Sua Maestà prevented him by saying angrily, 'I invite gentlemen to my palace, not *robbers!* Cacciatelo fuori!' Oh! Elena, is it not dreadful?"*

Helen was aghast at the tidings.

"Where is Gaetano now?"

"He was ordered to leave the palace."

"A bad business this, Helen dear," said Sir John, coming up to her. "I suppose our friend will have to go down on his marrow-bones to-morrow, and beg pardon! How will he like that I wonder?"

Not at all, Helen thought; and yet by this time she knew enough of the Neapolitans, to be aware how patiently and submissively they kissed the rod.

Mr. Marchmont joined them with kind expressions of sympathy.

"It might have been much worse Madame la Princesse. I recollect that one day at a review, the King slapped the face of my friend, the Duca di S^{ta} R —!"

"By George!" cried Sir John, "see an Englishman take that, from either King or kaiser! How did the Maccaroni bear it?"

"Tore off his epaulettes and threw them at the sovereign's feet!"

"Right, quite right! but I wonder he had the spirit."

This conversation had been carried on in whispers,

* A similar scene actually occurred at Naples to the young Duca di G —.

and was now stopped by the Queen leaving her seat to go among her guests, when Helen had to follow with her heart full of apprehension.

Dancing proceeded uninterrupted, in which the younger members of the Royal family joined, and between whiles the King and Queen moved among their visitors till the supper hour.

Sir John Selwood wandered about the splendid suite of rooms disconsolately; now remarking the varied costumes that passed in review before him, or laughing at the many unlucky wights whose clothes were besmeared with wax. When tired of this, he tried to estimate the cost of the magnificent Brussels carpet—said to be the largest ever wove in one piece—that covered the immense ball-room. This little sum so puzzled the good baronet, that he took to counting the candles instead; but on reaching six hundred in the tea-room alone, his patience was exhausted.

When formerly at Naples, Sir John had made many acquaintances among the natives, and found the city gay enough. This time, however, he experienced a change in their manners; and on this particular night, when it became known that he was connected with the disgraced Principe di Castelbianco, none ventured to enliven his solitude. He saw he was shunned, except by one individual, who perceiving that he was a stranger persisted in following him about, and cross-questioning his opinions on general subjects, politics included. The worthy baronet amused himself for some time by mystifying this personage, till the supper-rooms were opened, and effected a diversion in his favour.

Previous to this event, however, he once more crossed Helen's path, and learnt from her that she would rejoin him in the ball-room, so soon as their Majesties,

having finished supper in their private apartments, should grant her her *congé*.

The tables for the *invités* were laid in a long gallery, and were covered with delicacies of every description. Enormous fish resting on marble slabs; wild boar served entire, with their natural heads and polished tusks; peacocks with rainbow tails concocted of coloured jellies, and many other kingly dishes were there. Sir John, after a hard battle with the besieging army of ladies, succeeded in procuring a plateful of some non-descript, and then rushed off to an inner room, leading to the private apartments, there to await his niece's return.

After some delay his patience was rewarded by the door being opened disclosing the Princess. "Well, Helen, dear, I began to think you were going to play me false!"

"I could not get away earlier, dear uncle; but at any rate I have waited for something!"

"What is it, little woman? You look brighter than you did."

"Listen. After supper his Majesty addressed me about Gaetano. I felt ready to faint with fright and nervousness, and I hardly know what I said,—something about my grief at his having incurred his Majesty's displeasure; that it had been unintentional; and that I hoped the error would in consequence be pardoned. I was aware that I spoke foolishly, and hesitated a great deal, but at length with a smile the King held out his hand for me to kiss, and bid me tell the Prince to come to-morrow, and make his excuses in person.

"Bravo, little Helen! He owes his forgiveness to you then."

But Helen did not confess the whole truth,—that his Majesty had pointedly awarded Castalbiano's pardon to his gentle wife's solicitations. "And now let us go home, dear uncle, I want to see Gaetano and set his mind at ease."

"Ay, but we must get hold of the Duchessa first. I left her in a corner of the supper-room, turning her back to the company, and stuffing away at railroad-speed!"

Helen smiled; and together they went in search of their relations, whom they at length discovered still occupied with their plates. Checchina having just asked for a second helping of *mayonnaise*, Helen saw she must wait a while longer, though she tried to make her sister-in-law comprehend how wearied she was and how anxious about the Prince.

"You have had your supper, I suppose?" said the Duchessa. "Wasn't it *d'una squisitezza straordinaria* at their Majesties' table?"

"It may have been so, but I had no appetite, and was too unhappy to eat, or remark it," answered Helen.

Via, *I* never lose my appetite! You don't deserve the good luck of supping with a King and Queen, when you treat it so coolly!"

"Not had any supper!" exclaimed Sir John, "that'll never do. What will you have? Some of that flaming peacock's tail, or a slice of that monster nondescript of the deep, swordfish, tunny, or what not?"

"If I must have something, uncle, let it be a little *consommé*."

Just then the Duchessa's esquire arrived with her plate refilled, and ascertaining Helen's wants, insisted on satisfying them himself. In due time he returned,

placed a cup in the Princess' hand, and started off on some fresh errand.

"Don't you like it?" asked Sir John, noticing his niece's wry face.

"See, my glove is covered with *mayonnaise* sauce which has soiled the cup, and it smells of the rankest oil. I cannot drink it indeed," and setting it down, she endeavoured to remove the odoriferous mess from her glove.

"How can that woman eat such filthy stuff?" remarked Helen, observing how the Duchessa apparently relished her repast.

"Evidently King Ferdinand knows what is suited to the palates of his subjects, if not to ours," answered her uncle.

At length the Duchessa reluctantly agreed to tear herself away from the delicacies set before her, and having exacted a similar act of self-denial on the part of Harry the Eighth, the party sought their carriage in the small hours of the morning.

On reaching home, Helen learnt that her husband had long retired to rest, probably from the certainty that on so busy a night he should find no companions to join him in any of his nocturnal pursuits. He woke up, however, sufficiently, to prove that he was in no very amiable temper. Wherefore, his wife, in order to disarm the bruin, hastened to relate the agreeable tidings whereof she was the bearer. Castelbianco listened eagerly enough, and with no small mental relief, yet his disappointment continued unabated, and he poured into her patient ears all the vexation he had been silently devouring since his ignominious exit from the palace.

"The costume which he had reckoned on making

such a striking effect, the beautiful arms—all to have failed so signally! It was too barbarous, too tyrannical! *He* would never show himself at the palace again, or kiss the Sovereign's hand, welcome banishment instead!"

But next morning he moderated his indignation, and ere noonday had meekly embraced his chains once more.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE carnival passed away, and was followed by Lent, and as the spring advanced the Duchessa prepared to return to her mountain fastness. Miss Eden, through the Princess's instrumentality, was soon happily domesticated with Madame de Meudon, whom she accompanied to France. Her successor in the family was a much smarter personage in her dress, and was already high in her employer's good graces, through the cringing ways she adopted towards her, and the praises she bestowed on "the dear children." A glance sufficed to show Helen she was a very bad style of person and very vulgar in her manners; and on opening her mouth she betrayed a decided aversion to the letter H, which she invariably discarded from its proper place and introduced where it had no business to appear.

The Princess pointed out this failing to her sister-in-law, adding that Miss Smith would not teach her pupils very pure English; but her advice was rejected, as the Duchessa, though unable to judge of her governess's powers of instruction, was pleased with her exterior and proud of being able to show her neighbours what a smart foreigner was attached to her suite. Helen afterwards learnt that Miss Smith had been originally a lady's maid, and had hurriedly received her *cong  * with an indifferent character. To rectify this mischance, she became a pervert, and immediately fortune smiled upon

her. Let us mention, *en passant*, that the Duchessa was eventually as glad to be rid of her acquaintance as had been her former mistress. Miss Smith then sought refuge in a convent, where she died shortly afterwards ; and habited in the garb of a nun her body was exposed to the reverential gaze of the public, as one who had departed this life in the odour of sanctity !

The Duchessa was so well satisfied with the accounts she received of her eldest girl's progress at college, that she even endeavoured to persuade Helen to place Marie at I Miracoli, where her religious education would be as well attended to as her cousin's. Helen recoiled from the bare thought, and remembered how she had assisted in procuring an English governess for the children of an Italian nobleman, who was so horrified on discovering the state of dirt and neglect in which they were kept at this Royal school, that he took them away from it on the instant. This act brought him into a good deal of trouble, from which he was only extricated by his high rank and great influence, but the duty he owed to his children would allow of no alternative.

Poor Helen trembled lest Gaetano should be influenced by his sister, but knowing that any opposition on her part would only be a *raison de plus* with him to approve the plan, she wisely kept silence, and prayed for the Duchessa's departure.

But the Prince was not one to be talked into anything, much less by his sister ; and as his affairs were too involved to allow him to incur extra expenses just then, and Helen did not rouse his spirit of contrariety, he turned a deaf ear to the suggestion. "Maria is such a child : time enough to think of her education !"

And so the Duchessa took herself off with all her retinue, among whom we may number her husband,

for the good man always kept his allotted place in her wake, in all due humility.

Sir John Selwood had also quitted Naples to spend Easter at Rome, intending to return to his favourite niece when the malaria season should drive him away from the Eternal City. Just before his departure he had a long private conversation with the Prince which ended in his consenting to satisfy a few of the latter's most pressing debts, and Helen reaped the benefit thereof in Castelbianco's improved temper. Another circumstance added to this happier mood; he had hopes that his wife would present him with a son towards the end of the summer, after keeping him ever since little Marie's birth in a state of blank disappointment and mortification. To have only one child, and that a girl, was too humiliating to his Neapolitan ideas; but now, after this long interval, his patience was likely to be rewarded, and he became a good deal more attentive to his wife in consequence.

This change in his temper afforded her some comfort, and she also hoped much that the birth of a son might secure to her the Prince's unstable affections; but on the other hand she knew too well that her Roman Catholic children would be hers only in name, and she anticipated her lonely future with dread.

She strove not to dwell upon this thought, but resolved with God's help to do her duty by her children as faithfully as the bigotry by which she was surrounded would allow her, and so acting she could safely trust the event to Heaven.

Some months had elapsed since she had received any tidings of the Contessa di Malafede, and she was becoming seriously anxious, when Jones,—who made a point of always delivering the letters herself, in order

to see and rejoice in the happy expression which then overspread her dear mistress's face, — brought her the following from Louisa:—

“Melfi, May 15th.

“I fear I have kept you waiting a long time, dear Helen, for an answer to your last welcome letter, but I have had my hands so full of work lately, that I have been unable to attend even to you, who occupy a first place in my heart and thoughts.

“My husband has been suffering severely from the fever of this horrible place, and at one time I feared he would die; but, thank Heaven, he has lately rallied wonderfully, and *good news* (yes, Helen, I can imagine your surprise) has proved a better physician in this case than any of his other doctors. I would not mention our hopes to you till they should be either realised or utterly crushed; but when I saw how wretchedly ill and broken-spirited poor Luigi was becoming—how hopeless his recovery in this pest-house—I addressed as strong an appeal to the King as I could pen consistently with the respect due to his Majesty. I recalled to his memory the kind assurances he gave me at the Duomo; dwelt on my husband's entire innocence and on the retired life he had always led, never taking a part in politics, but seeking only to be a good citizen and faithful subject to his sovereign. I described the afflicted state of my eldest child, the delicate health of my second boy in this unwholesome climate, and concluded by throwing myself on his Majesty's mercy, as being himself a husband and father.

“This petition I succeeded in getting privately conveyed to Don Ernesto the lawyer, who proved so brave a friend to us at the time of the expected trial. After

some trouble and delay he had it presented by a powerful personage at an auspicious moment, and the result was made known to us recently. We are permitted to return to Naples, where we may probably swell the ranks of the *attendibili**, but the Count is nominally *pardoned* (for what offence?), and light has once more dawned on our long night. I can hardly contain my joy at the prospect of seeing you once more, dearest, and were I not a steady matron and *mère de famille*, I should be almost tempted to join in Annette's exuberant spirits, and sing and dance about the house like the veriest child. This good, faithful soul has not passed a much happier time here than the rest of us, as there has been no one to understand her French, while her Gallo-Neapolitan is unintelligible to the Basilicata folk. Nevertheless she has tried always to look matters cheerfully in the face, exclaiming often, 'N'importe, madame; le bon temps viendra, vous verrez!' and appointing herself head nurse, chief cook, housekeeper, and lady's maid, with the skill and *savoir faire* peculiar to her nation.

"How much I shall have to talk over with you, Helen! I shall have my darling baby to exhibit — such a pet he is, and perfect, thank Heaven! in all his faculties. I had him thoroughly examined by the chief *medico* of the place, who quite ridiculed my fears; but at first I was full of apprehensions, which were only quieted when the little fellow grew old enough to laugh and crow like other babies. My dear Pepito is sometimes painfully jealous of his little brother, who however tries with such pretty engaging ways to coax him to play, that the poor child is gradually overcoming

* Suspected persons.

this unhappy disposition. I am most careful never to evince even the shadow of a preference between the children; and, Helen dear, this requires no art, for the very affliction of my first-born only makes me cling to him the more fondly. Pepito being six years old, he is big enough to engage all my spare time, and after infinite trouble and much discouragement at the commencement from my own ignorance how to set to work, I am now rewarded by seeing a manifest improvement in him. He has acquired the finger alphabet, with which he carries on long conversations, and 'tis amusing to see how he tries to teach it to his baby brother. In this land of signs the poor child will thus never be at a loss to make himself understood, and his intelligence and quickness of apprehension are so great, that I hope and trust his mind will be as much developed as his infirmity will allow of. You will be surprised to be told of one of his acquirements—he is learning to *play on the piano*! True, Helen! The child used to stand by and watch me with his great expressive eyes as I played, till at length I resolved to try whether I could make him understand it, if only as an employment for his fingers. Luigi laughed at the idea, but remained astonished when his son, with an air of infinite importance and pride, performed one of those *lively* airs, all minims and semibreves, which are always the first to be learnt.* We know that Beethoven used to play to himself when quite deaf, and why may not this afflicted child find amusement in the same way? He is passionately attached to me, and this enables me by a look to control his impatient temper, which would be otherwise hard to govern. It likewise stills the dis-

* The author was acquainted with a similar case.

tressing sounds which he makes when angry. God grant me wisdom and strength to do my duty by this unfortunate!

"Thus you can see, dear Helen, how much occupation I have cut out for me in caring for my sick husband, my deaf and dumb boy, and my beautiful baby. Yet I am happier far than I was a few years since,—happier with Luigi, in whose pursuits I try to interest myself, and whose attachment to his wife and children is a constant reproach to me for my early neglect and unkindness towards him.

"As soon as the Count's strength will permit him to be moved, we shall set out for Naples, and I shall be heartily thankful to turn my back on this dreary mountainous region, where earthquake and malaria reign paramount. I have no society in the town, and the roads are too bad to allow of intercourse with the neighbouring villages. Our house is as comfortless as country residences always are in this land; there is not a single fireplace to keep life in us during the winter, a season which is very severe in this district, as the snow then lies thick on the ground. The ill-fitting doors and windows, however, are pleasant enough in summer time, when I have found amusement in a garden attached to the house, which I have got into some sort of order to the astonishment of my neighbours, who beg flowers of me for all their religious ceremonies. I grudge these terribly, but dare not refuse them.

"And now, dear friend, I must conclude what I hope will be my last letter to you, for soon we shall see each other 'face to face,' and be able to judge how time and sorrow have treated each of us. You will find me greatly changed, but it matters not; my good looks are

willingly bartered for mental peace, which I have found instead.

"Begging you to remember us both to the Prince, I remain your attached friend,

"LOUISA."

Truly this letter gladdened Helen's heart considerably, and though she had no one to share her joy, for latterly Castalbiano had not felt very warmly towards the Contessa di Malafede, still she had pleasant food for her thoughts, and could rejoice at the prospect of once more having a friend and companion at hand.

Some months wore on; the travellers did not make their appearance, and Helen's hopes fell lower and lower as the period for her confinement approached.

Sir John Selwood returned to Naples to be near his niece, and Castalbiano held up his head proudly in confident expectation of his coming paternal honours. Poor Helen alone felt depressed and anxious, remembering how much of sorrow and trial dated from the birth of her first child, and dreading lest her second should likewise prove an unwelcome girl. She had also looked for Louisa's kind nursing and tender care, and now she might not arrive in time. And then Helen would scold herself for her fears and misgivings, and trust herself, whether for weal or for woe, to the care of Providence.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE Principe di Castelbianco walked hurriedly up and down the drawing-room, knitting his brows, and occasionally muttering half audibly to himself. Sir John Selwood meanwhile, true to his English habits, stood before the empty fireplace, deluding himself into the belief that it contained a bright blaze on that hot September evening.

"Via, coraggio, amico!" he exclaimed at length to the Prince; "all will be well soon, let us hope."

"So long as it is a boy! But that it is sure to be, don't you think so?"

"Certainly it *ought* to be a son and heir now," responded the Baronet as in duty bound, "but should the fates will it otherwise, we must hope for better luck next time, my friend!"

A frown from the Prince was his only reply,—the *present*, not the *future*, occupied his most anxious thoughts just then. He continued his walk at a faster pace than before.

"What an uproar those horrid women are making!" ejaculated Sir John Selwood, going towards the door, as a noisier burst than usual broke from the various neighbours and female servants assembled to await the auspicious event, and chatter, Neapolitan fashion, at the highest pitch of their voices; "the wretches don't seem to think that sick people can have any nerves!" So

saying, he opened the door hastily, and found himself face to face with Mr. —, the English doctor.

"Is the Prince here?" inquired the latter with a satisfied countenance.

"How is she, Doctor?" asked Sir John anxiously.

"All right, my dear Sir, mother and daughter both going on well."

"Thank Heaven!" said the Baronet heartily, with a sigh of relief.

"What—what did you say?" exclaimed Castalbiano, hurrying forward, "Elena—my son?"

"A daughter, Signor Principe."

"*A daughter—another? Speak, man, diavine! I won't be made a fool of, do you hear?*"

The English practitioner (who had been summoned at Sir John's express desire, on his perceiving how little confidence his niece reposed in the native doctors) looked aghast at such an address, and hesitated for a moment in his reply.

"Madame la Princesse has a fine healthy little girl, and is herself as well as can be expected. I congratulate you, Monsieur le Prince —"

He had no time to conclude his polite speech, as Castalbiano pushed him rudely aside and with an angry exclamation hurried from the apartment.

"Stay, Castalbiano!" cried the Baronet in alarm; "where are you going?"

"Not into the patient's room, surely, at such a pace!" said the doctor, hastening after the Prince; "he will startle her and produce fever—headache! Stop, Signor Principe—*piano, piano!*"

And the two rushed in pursuit of the husband. He flung open the bedroom door and entered.

"Is it a boy or a girl? Answer, woman!" he cried

to the English nurse, who, terrified for the young mother's safety, endeavoured to hush the madman's noise.

Helen shivered and trembled,—she understood it all.

“Is it a boy, Elena cara?” he whispered, bending over his wife, and looking in her pale face with gleaming eyes.

She did not, could not answer.

“The beautifullest little girl that ever was seen, my Lord!” whispered the nurse complacently. “Only please to hush; my lady is rather nervous and weak.”

A fierce ejaculation of anger and disappointment—a sharp cry of pain from the frail young wife as the husband first struck her in his wrath, and afterwards pushed the nurse out of his path for attempting to restrain his violence—then the Baronet and the doctor seized his arms and dragged him by main force from the sick chamber.*

“Brute! monster!” stammered Sir John, scarcely able in his excitement to articulate.

The Prince shook him off.

“Unhand me!” he said sharply.

“You have endangered her life,—killed her perchance.”

“Bah! women don't die so easily as all that,—no such luck! Your precious Elena has been a trouble to me ever since we met; a bad bargain she has proved.”

“As to that,” exclaimed the enraged Englishman, “*she* has fared the worst in marrying such a miscreant. Your debts and your brutality have wellnigh already broken the poor thing's heart, but if I can help it Helen shall no longer be subjected to such treatment. Should she die now you will be her murderer;” and

* This is no imaginary scene, but one that was really enacted by a Neapolitan nobleman.

the Baronet struck an angry blow with his clenched fist on the table beside him.

Mr. —, the doctor, had sought his patient's bedside the instant he had succeeded, with the assistance of Sir John Selwood, in ridding the sick chamber of Castelbianco's presence. He was alarmed for the consequences of such a shock to the unhappy Princess, and even the monthly nurse forgot the outrage her own dignity had received in her anxiety for the safety of her charge. The tears coursed freely down the cheeks of faithful Jones, as she watched silently beside her dear mistress; and even Minette's attendant left the child alone, in order to see after the gentle lady whom all the household valued and loved so well.

Poor Sir John kept vigil at the door, or peeped in with an appealing look to the doctor for comfort and reassurance, but on the latter shaking his head dubiously the affectionate uncle would steal away on tiptoe, and once was discovered in the corridor indulging in a secret burst of tears. These would be succeeded by a bitter rage against Castelbianco, towards whom his feelings were such as no words can describe. To the mind of a true-hearted Englishman there is something so brutal and cowardly in the fact of a stronger being striking a weaker, and that victim a wife and mother stretched on a bed of sickness, at a moment when all one's sympathies are enlisted in her favour, that—Heaven be praised!—he will hardly realise its possibility.

“The man that lays his hand upon a woman,
Save in the way of kindness, is a wretch
Whom 'twere gross flattery to name a coward.”

Sir John had no idea that his favourite niece had been subjected more than once to such vile treatment;

that her fair skin had been bruised, her voice frequently heard by the servants, raised in piteous entreaty. He did not know that Jones had interfered, not once, nor twice, to save her unhappy mistress, and had only been restrained from writing to Mr. Mowbray by Helen's earnest prayers, who once even on her knees besought the horrified attendant to spare her aged father and mother the shame and sorrow such news would convey. Her uncle as yet knew nought of this, but not long did he remain in ignorance of the truth.

As day dawned he softly opened the door of the sick chamber and beckoned Jones to come out to him. She did so.

"Jones," he whispered, "did *he* ever ——" but his face contracted as if from sudden pain, and he paused.

"Did *this thing* ever happen before? Tell me truly."

"Yes, Sir John, often. Miss Mary was hurried into the world in much the same fashion."

An indignant ejaculation broke from her horrified listener.

"Why did you never tell? She ought to have been saved long ago."

"She would not let me, indeed, Sir. The dear lady wished to spare her parents."

Sir John's eyes were dimmed, and he turned hastily away.

Thus the sorrowing watchers passed the night; far otherwise did it speed with Castelbianco.

After a lengthened stormy interview with Sir John Selwood, the Prince had hurried from the house to cool his heated brow and tumultuous passions in the open air. The early September night had set in calm and warm, and the dark vault of heaven was spangled o'er with glittering stars, intensely brilliant compared with

those that light our northern skies. He looked upwards involuntarily, for an Italian's heart rejoices in the glory of those southern summer nights, but now every star, to the miscreant's fancy, appeared to be an eye fixed full upon him, reproaching him with his cowardice. He muttered an angry curse and hastened onwards without looking to the right or left till he was arrested by a long flight of steps. They commenced the ascent to St. Elmo, and, with another malediction at his stupidity in having strayed so much out of the way, he slowly recrossed the deserted bridge and descended the narrow street leading to the Strada di Chiaja. There the ruling passion returned, and he sought oblivion as usual in excitement.

His companions greeted him with loud welcomes, and inquiries after his wife, and whether they might yet congratulate him on the birth of a son. He bade them sharply leave him in peace, and called for wine.

"Che belle maniere son queste!" laughed one of his friends. "I suppose Gaetano is too proud of his approaching honours to be even civil to such *nobodies* as we *poveri smogliati* are?"

"Lascialo stare, Ciccio," said another, addressing the young Marchese di —, "or he may do you a mischief. I don't like the look of his eyes to-night."

"Per Bacco! I don't wish to court the society of such a surly brute!" and the youth resumed his cards.

Castelbianco also sat down to play, and won the first few games; flushed with his success, he staked his entire winnings at once and lost them. His opponent, a cool hand, remarking his excitement, advised him to desist, but the proposition was scornfully rejected, and the play continued; and still the Prince lost heavily.

His friends gathered round to watch the proceedings,

and the Marchese di —, in a spirit of good nature, told the Prince he had better play no more that night, or perhaps his long absence might make the Princess anxious in her then delicate state.

“Gaetano, you must not risk losing your new honours.”

“—— my honours!” exclaimed the angry man. “What do you all mean, by ridiculing and taunting me with my disappointment? Can you not leave me alone? Do you think I am ruined and have no money to play with?”

They retreated; it was useless to argue with him then.

At that sitting the very rings on Helen’s fingers were staked and lost, and Castelbianco returned to his dreary home with heavier gambling debts than he could possibly pay.

At the end of a few days his poor wife rallied, and the kind physician began to entertain hopes of her ultimate recovery. She never alluded to her husband, who, on his side, made no show or pretence of anxiety about her welfare. She lay in a constant state of stupor, but it was observed that the sight of her infant, the unhappy though innocent cause of all this woe, was distressing to her in the extreme.

Sir John, though constantly in the Palazzo, had no intercourse with the Prince, and only waited for his niece’s partial recovery to remove her entirely from his vicinity. Ere this could be effected, however, the poor little delicate baby became so feeble that Padre Calvi christened it, and shortly after it was at rest.

They feared at first to tell the mother, though apparently she cared for it so little; but she soon missed it, and, guessing by their countenances what had occurred, she asked plainly, “Is it dead?” Her uncle, who was

present, stooped and kissed her pale wasted cheeks ; he could make no other answer.

"Poor baby !" she said gently with dry eyes, "it is better so—she was not welcome here !" and then, turning away her face, she lay silent and motionless for a long time.

Slowly, very slowly, Helen's strength returned, till one bright autumn forenoon Sir John Selwood saw her placed in a carriage, and conveyed to the Castellammare railway station, accompanied by little Marie.

The child was subdued and tearful at sight of her mamma's sickness and woe, and she tried many pretty coaxing ways to get at the truth of her great sorrow. She had been delighted with her new little sister, and full of pride when the nurse placed the baby on her knees and held it there for a few minutes. One sad morning she was taken to see it lying in its little coffin like a delicate waxen doll, and Jones gave her some white roses to lay upon the poor babe, and lifted her up to kiss its blanched forehead ; but when little Marie's warm rosy lips touched that cold image, she started in affright and hid her face in Jones's bosom and cried bitterly. She was pacified at last when told that her little sister had gone to heaven, but could not quite understand why her dear mamma should look so sad if the baby were happy.

When Helen's health rallied under the influence of the October country air, Sir John Selwood, with many misgivings as to his chance of success, proposed her accompanying him to England as soon as her strength would stand the journey.

She was visibly startled.

"You need a thorough change of scene, darling," said her uncle, willing to advance sanitary reasons for the plan, "and your mother to nurse and get you well again."

Helen was now weeping silently.

"You know," he continued, "they have not seen Minette since she was a baby, and Charlotte in her very last letter urged your taking her home to be exhibited to her English relations."

There was no word of Castelbianco on either side.

"As you like, dear uncle; it may be better so," and Helen's lips trembled.

"There's a good little woman," said Sir John, kissing her with a lightened mind, "and to-morrow Minette must be left in charge of you while I go to Naples and see about the preliminaries." He did not say that these consisted in obtaining the Prince's consent, but Helen understood him quite well.

Sir John did not anticipate much pleasure from the approaching business interview with his Neapolitan relative, whom he had not seen since their quarrel on that fatal night.

Each had cleverly managed to avoid the other, though but for his niece's sake the uncle would never have set foot again within the Prince's doors; for it is rather awkward to go constantly to a man's house with whom one is not on speaking terms.

The Baronet's request for an interview was granted, and the Prince received him with a courtly bow, and motioned his visitor to a chair.

Declining the attention, Sir John plunged boldly into the matter he had in hand.

"Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray are anxious that their daughter and niece should pay them a long visit in England. Madame la Princesse will accept their invitation if you have no objection," — here Sir John's lip curled in scorn, — "and I do not think you will suffer much from the temporary separation?"

"You are just in your surmises, Monsieur le Chevalier; Madame la Princesse has my full permission to prolong her stay among her English relatives. She displays much prudence in so opportunely choosing the moment for her departure; it is always wise to quit a falling house in time."

"What does your insinuation refer to? Helen is quite incapable of any meanness or selfishness."

"Oh! *indubitablement*; only one is apt to draw inferences."

"Then 'tis a pity you don't draw good ones!" retorted the angry Baronet.

"Madame la Princesse is doubtless aware that I am under the unpleasant necessity of leaving my house—so soon as I can find a tenant for it—and seeking a humbler residence. We all know that 'love in a cottage' is better in theory than practice."

"Monsieur, my niece married *for love* against the wishes of her family, and I doubt whether you can say as much with a clear conscience. She had nothing to gain, but much to lose, and you know it. However, 'let bygones be bygones'; it is a bad business, and one on which I cannot speak calmly. I suppose you will hardly desire an interview with your wife and child before their departure? it were better avoided for the sake of all parties."

"You labour under a mistake, Monsieur le Chevalier," answered the Prince, with killing politeness. "Madame la Princesse is quite free to visit her family for the *benefit of her health*, and that for an indefinite period, if it so please her; but I did not answer for Maria,—I decidedly object to her accompanying her mother."

Sir John absolutely gasped for breath.

"What the —— then? Do you mean to separate mother and child?"

"Not unless my wife desire it."

"But how can she leave Marie behind?"

"She must choose between her English and Neapolitan relations," was the cool reply.

The baronet remained speechless for some moments, he was so indignant at the selfishness of the Prince, who, with no real affection for his child, yet exerted his parental authority on this occasion from the mere spirit of opposition. Castalbiano well knew that Helen would never desert her darling Marie, and he therefore determined to detain her as a kind of hostage, fearful lest he should otherwise lose any of the interest of his wife's income.

A long, angry discussion ensued, in which Sir John Selwood was by no means sparing of his opinion as to the Prince's ruffianly conduct towards his wife. Castalbiano was fully equal to engage at these same weapons, and when at length the disputants separated, the advantage remained very decidedly on the Neapolitan's side.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SIR JOHN SELWOOD returned to his niece with a heavy heart, and felt not a little mortified at the ill-success that had attended his mission. He ardently desired to see a separation effected between Castelbianco and his wife, as, otherwise, he was convinced that she would be the constant victim of his brutality. He did not believe it possible that Helen could retain any remnant of her early attachment for the hero of her girlhood; surely that fond fancy had been long ago rudely dissipated! But Marie? How could he advise a mother to desert her child?—how talk of leaving that gentle, winning little darling to the tender mercies of such a father—a gambler, a passionate and ruined man? The Baronet's kind heart froze at the thought.

Helen, who read his countenance easily, saw quickly that he had failed in his undertaking; but when Sir John—made anxious at sight of her pale face—endeavoured to reason her into the practicability and desirableness of going to England for the sake of her health, and thus made a desperate attempt to close his heart against poor little Minette's claims, his niece looked reproachfully at him.

“Would you have me part from Marie?”

“Only for a time darling—a few months; the change would do you a world of good, and the child might be placed at I Miracoli, or perhaps your friend the Contessa would look after her.”

"Dear uncle, this is out of the question. A mother's duties may not be so readily ignored, even were it possible for me to wish to leave my child! Besides," she added with a faint smile, "parted from Minette my health would improve very little, I assure you."

Sir John still endeavoured to shake her determination, though acting all the time wilfully against the dictates of his conscience; but when Helen at length begged him kindly, though firmly, to urge her no more, he suddenly veered quite round, and taking her in his arms warmly applauded her resolution.

Minette ran into the room at the same moment, ignorant of the plot that good Uncle John had been hatching against her peace; whereupon he immediately inquired if she should not like to go to I Miracoli to be near her cousin, and wear a coloured scarf and waistband, and have an extra dish at dinner on the Queen's name-day.

Maria, seated on her uncle's knees, first looked inquiringly up in his would-be serious face, and then glanced at her mamma's, about whose eyes she quickly detected traces of recent tears. Scrambling down from her elevation, regardless of the baronet's endeavours to detain her (for he began to doubt the wisdom of his experiment) poor Minette rushed into her mother's arms, and clasping her convulsively with her own small dimpled hands, sobbed as if her little heart would break. How often good-natured people tease children through mere thoughtlessness, never stopping to think that what is only play to wiser heads, is death to their poor little victims. How well we can each of us recollect undergoing such small martyrdoms, and how their persecutors stand forth clearly defined in our memories from out the dimness which envelopes most of our childish remi-

niscences. 'Tis a cruel sport, wherefore good reader never practise it, however innocent may be your intentions.

Poor Sir John was sorely distressed at this climax. A stranger entering the room would have wondered to see his honest countenance all troubled and perplexed, as kneeling beside his two nieces, he tried to make his peace with each; the elder one soon yielded her gracious forgiveness, but the younger was harder to win over. However, when Marie after much sobbing, felt rather tired from the exertion, and glancing at the offender with magnanimous intentions, saw his rueful face, she gave a little reluctant laugh at its comical aspect, and then the enemy was fairly conquered.

Helen continued at Sorrento; her future home life was so ill-defined, that she delayed returning to it as long as possible, and perhaps she might have remained in the country all that winter, had not a fiat summoned her back which there was no disobeying. Ferdinand II. as the father of his people, was often a referee in their matrimonial squabbles, and many a poor lady has cast herself at his feet, and implored his protection from her husband's misdoings.

But although the King would take the part of the weaker vessel, he could not countenance the scandal of a separation between man and wife among his Roman Catholic subjects; the national religion forbade it; so after lecturing the husband, the parties were always advised to make the best of their galling chains. The 'Castelbiancos' domestic troubles had soon come to the sovereign's ears. The Prince was ordered to the palace to give an account of himself, which he could not do very clearly or satisfactorily, though he endeavoured to

lay all the blame to his wife's difference of religion. This was politic, as the King did not approve of his subjects marrying heretics, and took care to give publicity to this opinion; but the Princess had won favour with his Majesty, who knew her husband's character too well to give implicit credence to his evasion. Helen, being a Protestant, might not be deterred by conscientious motives from seeking a separation; all that Sua Maestà could do, therefore, was to warn his unruly subject to behave himself better for the future, and bid him try to effect a reconciliation with Madame la Princesse.

Castelbianco bowed compliance with due humility, promised amendment, and flew to execute his sovereign's commands, burning inwardly the while with impotent rage against his luckless wife. He immediately addressed an angry letter to the latter, ordering her to return home on pain of the King's displeasure; and Helen obeyed the mandate like the dutiful, helpless victim she was. Henceforth they lived under the same roof; but that was all. They rarely met, and when they did so, were only distantly civil to each other; for the Prince regarded Helen as an obstacle in his way, while she looked upon him with positive *fear*.

Sir John Selwood lingered on at Naples; he had not courage to desert Helen under her present circumstances, but postponed his departure from day to day, "hoping against hope" that some happy change might come to her rescue.

The return of the Contessa di Malafede formed a welcome break to this distressing state of things, and the two friends met each other with their feelings of affection only increased by their long and sad separation.

Helen noticed with delight and thankfulness the

improvement in Louisa's mind and character. She seemed so much more at peace with herself and others, so engrossed by her children, so attentive to her poor husband, whose health had been sorely shaken by the hardships he had undergone. Her youngest child was a dear, winning little fellow, both loving and loveable in his ways, while poor Pepito attracted sympathy by his very misfortunes. His large dark eyes were full of intelligence, and he readily answered some questions which Helen addressed to him with her fingers. His gaze ever followed his mother's movements, while she constantly had an arm caressingly round him.

In face, Louisa looked an older and sadder woman than when the Princess remembered her a bride at Naples; but now her temper was more even, her countenance less fretful, for wide is the difference between *sadness* and fretfulness; the one is of a person's own making, while the other may come from Heaven-sent trials. Louisa could not be *happy* with a deaf and dumb child ever before her eyes, and an invalid husband dependent on her care, but she was at peace with that husband, with herself, and with the world in general, a blessing which had not always been her portion.

About the period at which our story has arrived, a good deal of agitation prevailed among all classes at Naples with reference to politics, a subject, however, which only the favoured English could discuss with impunity. The winter of 1856 had been unusually gay, owing to the entertainments given at Court, while Easter was enlivened by a grand ball at the French Minister's to celebrate the ratification of peace. It was honoured by the presence of the King and the royal families of Naples and Tuscany; and the representatives

of England, Russia, and France, then figuratively shook hands in public after their late rather serious difference of opinion.

But alas ! all this outward show

“ Only flattered to betray ! ”

Whispers were circulated that the army was becoming disaffected, for which a cause was assigned in a recent act of gross tyranny on the part of a colonel of the Guards, who had flogged two privates, gentlemen, nearly to death, for presuming to sit down while on duty. These unhappy men had been so overcome by fatigue from previous hard work, that they applied to their captain for permission to rest themselves : it was granted ; but the colonel passing and discovering their *unsoldier-like* attitude, sentenced them to instant punishment. In vain the victims pleaded their captain's express permission ; their remonstrance was unheeded ; and in consequence the entire regiment rose in rebellion, and dispatched a message to the Marine Barracks, summoning them, with their staunch allies the artillery, to follow their example. This outbreak, which might have proved most serious, was quickly checked, there being an immense military force stationed in the capital ; the colonel was imprisoned, and the regiment of guards put under arrest for mutiny.

Immediately after this affair a proclamation suddenly appeared on the walls of Naples, in the month of July 1856, calling on the people to unite and require the government to redress their grievances. It contained no violent or revolutionary language, attacked no existing powers ; but while it advised temperate though firm remonstrance, it clearly warned all those whom

the fact concerned, that stronger measures would be adopted if the first step should fail.

This proclamation was instantly torn down by the police, and it is needless to add that the gaping populace looked on with laudable equanimity.

England and France then took the part of the oppressed; but Ferdinand II., with all due politeness, announced his intention of governing his loving subjects according to his own ideas of what was due to them, which differed remarkably from those entertained by the allies. The two representatives finding their counsel rejected, informed his Majesty that as they could not countenance his severe measures, they must beg to demand their passports. The King regretted the necessity they were under of leaving, and courteously wished them a *bon voyage*; upon which the French Minister, in somewhat questionable taste, made a public exit from the capital, accompanied by his family and staff, choosing the most crowded time of day to traverse the Toledo at a snail's pace with his *cortège* of travelling carriages. Few people knew when the English *chargé d'affaires* took his unostentatious departure in the early morning.

Matters continued very quietly to follow their usual course, when in December the *stronger measures* hinted at in the proclamation began to show themselves under a peculiar form, though one that is essentially Italian. On the 8th, the fête of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin was celebrated as usual at the Champ de Mars; mass was performed in presence of the assembled army, which after receiving the banners blessed by the officiating prelates, passed in review before the sovereign. This was the moment chosen by Agésilao Milano to attempt the King's life, and it was

said that he had urgently requested to be placed on duty that day, though it was not his turn of service. Aiming at Ferdinand's side with his bayonet, he was foiled by a shirt of mail for which he was not prepared. Count de Latour, who was returning from a distant part of the field, whither he had been dispatched on a message, saw the attempt made by the regicide, and spurred his horse to the rescue, for the rest of his Majesty's brave defenders stood paralysed with fear, looking helplessly on. Milano taking better aim was about to repeat his attack, this time pointing his bayonet at the King's throat, when the Count's charger, dashing up against the assassin, stumbled and fell, rolling both his rider and the regicide together on the ground. The latter was then secured, the review continued; and afterwards the King, who had not once flinched, accompanied by the Queen and other members of his family, drove through the town and on the Corso in open carriages unattended by any military escort.

Within a week Milano was executed, and owing to a clumsy apparatus and bungling executioners, his sufferings were unnecessarily and cruelly protracted. Still it must be questioned whether Garibaldi's pension to the family of an assassin was a step taken in the right direction?

A few days after Milano's death an *accident* occurred, which timid minds also attributed to the *stronger measures* already alluded to.

On the 17th of December about noon, a loud and fearful report startled the town, and smashed the windows of houses even far distant from the scene of danger, while a black cloud of smoke rose in the air. The populace fled through the streets screaming "*fui! fui!*" (run! run!) carriages dashed into *porte cochères* for

shelter, and shop and house doors closed as by magic. It was some time ere the origin of all this fright was ascertained; but when people left their hiding-places to inquire into the affair, they learnt that an explosion had occurred in the arsenal, where gunpowder was being landed from a steamer just arrived from Palermo. The arsenal and the military molo are situated immediately under the palace windows, in which not a solitary pane of glass was left standing. Moreover, the chief dépôt for gunpowder was proved to be in vaults under the royal residence, to which a train was discovered ready laid for firing. It will be easily believed that these dangerous contents were removed as fast as men's hands could work and transmit them to the several castles. Seventeen lives were lost by the explosion, four being those of officers, while two officers and twenty-eight men of a lower grade were wounded; but it was said that more had suffered than are here mentioned.

The King remained in the dockyard all the afternoon superintending the search after the killed and wounded; the steamer was greatly damaged, and the destruction of glass in the town and palace was immense, many accidents arising from its falling on the heads of the flying multitude. One English gentleman, who held an official appointment at Naples, had the brim of his black hat pierced by a fragment of glass, as he was walking along the Toledo.

It is needless to dwell on the agitation which these events occasioned in the minds of thinking men: this is not a political work, and we do but glance at these occurrences so far as they relate to the better elucidation of our story, in which most of the incidents, though the actors are dressed in an impenetrable disguise, have had a foundation in real life.

“Fielding used to maintain that ‘the only difference that exists between history and novels, is that in the former nothing is true but the names and dates, and in the latter all is true but the dates and names.’”

A good conclusion for this chapter, though we beg to remark that the veracity of *our* political dates cannot be impugned.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Thus December 1856 ended. The old year went out amid much anxiety and many forebodings of evil, and the new one came in attended by prospects which were very little brighter.

The Castelbiancos in particular fared no better than their neighbours, as the Prince's affairs became daily more and more involved. January is the month at Naples in which new leases are taken, while the fourth of May is the universal day for changing houses; then "all the world and his wife" are to be seen out of doors, occupied in the removal of their goods and chattels.

According to precedent therefore, Castelbianco, in the very beginning of the new year, arranged to let his private apartment in the palace, for which a tenant quickly presented himself, when the Prince engaged a humble suite of rooms at a proportionate rent in the adjoining Strada Egiziaca. Helen's opinion or convenience was not consulted, the proposed change was officially announced to her, and she made ready for it accordingly.

She rarely met her husband, though he spent most of his time at home, leaning out of a window, smoking or playing cards with any chance visitor who might enliven his solitude. When she did see him occasionally, she was shocked at the ravages dissipation had

wrought in his appearance, but as he honoured her with few words, she never intruded her remarks or inquiries unasked.

She saw a good deal of the Contessa, — who, in consequence of her husband's political experiences, led a very retired life—and found constant occupation in overlooking Marie's education. An Italian governess had been recently engaged to instruct the child, who could no longer be entirely trusted to the guardianship of a Protestant mother, and Helen was persuaded that she was indebted to Padre Calvi for this innovation. She felt that it would be useless to demur, and notwithstanding the natural jealousy with which she regarded the person who had taken her place as Minette's teacher, she could not but acknowledge the retiring, amiable character of the unwelcome intruder.

The Princess's health and spirits were too shattered to allow of her entering society, and the opera, which alone would have afforded her any enjoyment, was out of her reach, she had no box at San Carlo that season. Many Neapolitan friends invited her to a seat in theirs as often as she liked, but the ceaseless idle gossip of such a *società* distracted her, and she generally framed some excuse for declining.

On the fourth of January, however, Helen received a note from the Contessa announcing that she had engaged an opera-box for that evening, and would call for her friend on her way to the theatre. The same morning she got her husband's message, acquainting her that he had succeeded in letting his apartment. She endeavoured resolutely to shut out all regret at quitting a house that she had somewhat *Anglicised*. She had accustomed herself now to the rooms, and they were an apology for a *home*, while the beautiful view

that met her eyes from the windows of her boudoir, had calmed her excited spirits on many a heart-aching day.

She knew well that her future residence would afford her no such relief—a narrow, dirty street, though much favoured by the Neapolitans, would be her look out. But hers was not a nature to anticipate troubles, and she would thankfully make any sacrifice on her part that might lighten the load of debt by which they were burdened.

Louisa's carriage was announced at the appointed hour, and Helen obeyed the summons. When she had descended the first flight of stairs, she found that she had forgotten her opera-glass, and therefore desired the servant to go back for it. While she awaited his return on the landing-place, she heard footsteps approaching rapidly, and looking down the staircase saw Castalbiano turn the corner of a lower flight. The sight of him now always made her heart beat fast from nervousness, and she caught hold of the banisters to steady herself. He did not perceive her at first, for he was ascending quickly with downcast eyes, but, when near her, he looked up and started; his wife started likewise, her husband's face was so ghastly pale.

"Elena! where are you going!"

"To the opera, with the Contessa di Malafede." Then, after a moment's hesitation, she ventured to add,

"Are you ill? has anything happened?"

"Ill, ha! ha!" with a dreary laugh, that made her shudder. "Not *ill*; you won't be rid of me yet, Elena. I'm only ruined — *only ruined*," he repeated, fixing his wild glittering eyes on his wife's terrified countenance. She feared that his mind was affected, and felt relieved

when the servant returned who, touching his hat, showed that he had got the glass.

"*Divertiti bene!*" exclaimed her husband, brushing past her.

She caught his arm.

"Gaetano, let me return upstairs with you, and then you can tell me what is the matter. I had rather not go to the opera."

"I am going out myself," he answered abruptly. "I can't stay at home both night and day — I should lose my senses!"

"Gaetano," she pleaded, "you *are* ill; don't quit me this night, I entreat."

"Don't be silly, child; I must go. I have promised to meet Giulio, his brother starts for Palermo at midnight, and we are to see him off. There, leave me, I am in a hurry," so saying he shook off the light weight of her hand, and sprang up two or three steps at a time. She descended slowly with all her anticipations of enjoyment for the evening dashed. A moment afterwards she heard herself called.

"Elena! Elena!"

She stopped. Castelbianco was again beside her. She gazed inquiringly at his haggard features, when he suddenly took her upturned face in both his hands, imprinted a kiss on her forehead, and without a word rushed upstairs again.

Helen felt sick and faint; a dread of coming evil filled her mind, and she leaned against the wall for support. She longed to follow her husband, and try to learn the reason of his strange conduct, but his temper was so capricious, that she feared to intrude herself, unbidden, in his presence. Besides he had told her he was to accompany Count Giulio's brother to his vessel, and she

was aware that this naval officer was really under orders to leave Naples that very night. Castelbianco's words were, therefore, likely enough to be true, and Helen only wished that all her husband's acquaintances were as unexceptionable as those two brothers. While she thus debated with herself, the Contessa's servant who had gone down to announce her coming, returned by his mistress's orders to say that they should be late if the Princess delayed longer. Thus urged, Helen hastened downstairs to apprise her friend of her new fears. Leaving them to proceed to San Carlo, let us follow the Prince's fortunes.

He remained but a short time in his apartment, and soon sallied forth again. The truth must be told — for the last month, Castelbianco had been a prisoner in his own house, except on Sundays and fête days, and when the shades of night rested on the city. Helen, alone, was ignorant of what every one else knew well; and happy it was for her, because she would hardly have borne the shame as unconcernedly as her husband, who felt that such a state of things was too common at Naples to excite surprise in any one. This day, however, he had learnt that an execution would shortly be put in his house, and how was he to quiet his creditors and delay the evil hour?

Thus pondering, distractedly he descended by the public staircase to the Strada di Chiaja, having appointed to meet his friends near the Largo S^{ta} Caterina, where Count Enrico Giulio, *Capitaine de Frégate dans le service de sa Majesté le Roi des Deux Siciles* lived with his wife and family. Castelbianco encountered the two brothers advancing arm-in-arm near the church of S^{ta} Ursula.

“Ha, Gaetano!” exclaimed our friend the bachelor

Count, "well met! Here is this poor devil Enrico in a most dolorous mental condition at parting from his dearly beloved wife, though he is bound no further away than Palermo, and will be back in about a month. See how much better it is to be free, and *smogliato* like me!—eh, *amici miei*?"

Castelbianco muttered some indistinct reply, while the sailor got up a faint laugh, and answered, "What a *pazzo di catena* that brother of mine is! It is very easy to crow over us as he does, but I know he is as jealous as he can be of our married felicity."

"*Niente affatto!*" said the elder brother, "why it suffices to look at you two Benedicts, with your woe-begone faces, to assure me that I am better off than either! I have only myself to care for in life, and were I to die this very night, nobody would be the worse."

"Lasciamo questo discorso per carità!" exclaimed the Prince hurriedly.

"*Caro mio*," said the sailor, pressing his brother's arm on which he leaned, "you talk lightly of your little value, but I know that you are a good brother and uncle to my wife and children; and if anything were to befall you—which the saints forbid!—no one would grieve more sincerely than I."

Count Giulio clasped the captain's hand in sole reply.

The trio had now reached the Caffè d'Europa, which they entered, that the sailor might take leave of any friends he met there. Talking, coffee, and cigars occupied them for an hour or more; and then bidding all farewell, the captain called his brother, saying, he must hasten on board.

"Come along with us, Gaetano," cried the Count, "and we two can afterwards return together."

They had to traverse the Palace Square to reach the descent to the arsenal, and as many sentries were stationed about there, they threw away the ends of their cigars to avoid the risk of a shot, or a bayonet wound, from any soldier who might take it into his head that he was insulted by the party passing by him smoking. The captain's official rank admitted them to the dockyard at that late hour without difficulty, but the bustle of preparation prevailed everywhere, as the frigate was to start at midnight, and convey recruits and *congedati* (soldiers whose term of service had expired), with their families, returning to their homes.

To a stranger, it had been a wild, fanciful scene to note the groups of dusky figures awaiting their turn for embarkation; the unhappy conscripts, many of them mere lads—still wearing their mountain or peasant dress, and carrying a scanty bundle; some wearied, perchance, by a long day's march, resting their aching limbs on the hard pavement, all having a look of hopeless misery depicted on their faces.

Again the fitful gleam of lanterns would rest on a group of *congedati*, standing beside their small possessions; mothers carrying wailing infants, fathers tending the elder children. Soldiers and sailors everywhere,—pushing, hurrying, crowding, and raising their harsh southern voices in a rude patois.

A stranger would have lingered to watch the motley throng, but the three young nobles hastened onwards to the landing-place, where the captain's boat was waiting to convey them on board. They remained a short time in the frigate, inspecting the arrangements below with that curiosity which landsmen always evince in nautical accommodations; but soon the hour of departure arrived, and Count Giulio spoke.

"Well, Enrico, we must be going, *che si fà tardi : addio, amico, e buon' viaggio !*"

The brothers embraced, and Castelbianco exchanged a similar farewell with his friend : then they went on deck, the captain promising to follow in a minute or two, to see them leave for the shore.

There was a slight delay in getting a boat, and the two young men resolved to beguile the time by smoking. Count Giulio procured a light without trouble, but Castelbianco's matches hung fire, and with an angry ejaculation that the sirocco had made them damp, he threw them all into the sea, and proceeded to ignite his cigar at his companion's. While thus occupied, Captain Enrico Giulio came on deck, and exclaimed instantly, in terrified accents,—

"Castelbianco ! Giulio ! what are you doing ? are you both mad ?" and seizing the Count's cigar, he cast it overboard.

"What do you mean ?" answered the latter, "Per Bacco ! I think *you* are gone suddenly mad, to treat a good Havannah that fashion."

"I mean," said the captain, "that this vessel is laden with gunpowder, and those kegs, close beside you, on the deck, are filled with the same combustible. I can allow of no smoking. Gaetano, throw away your cigar !"

He did so ; but the idea of his vicinity to so much powder, left unguarded on the open deck, made his hand tremble, and as he tried to cast the lighted cheroot overboard, it struck against some of the cordage, rebounded violently, and fell between the kegs. The captain made a rush to seek it, crying aloud, "*Santo Dio !*"

They were his last words.

* * * * *

Within five minutes of the fearful explosion that ensued, hurrying so many lives into eternity, the boats of her Britannic Majesty's steam-frigate "Malacca" were lowered, and on the spot, rendering all the assistance in their power to the few survivors, but the natives kept at a very respectful distance from the disastrous scene. The English saved about twenty-three lives, and though his Royal Highness Count d'A——, as Port Admiral, thanked them next day for their efficient services, the Neapolitans universally attributed the explosion to the English captain's machinations, evincing much activity in their inventive powers, though none in rescuing their perishing countrymen.

This fatal catastrophe was also by many attributed to a political cause: whether such was really the case, or that Castelbianco's lighted cigar fell on some scattered grains of powder, who can tell? One of the surviving seamen, who had heard his captain's conversation with Count Giulio and the Prince, related what he knew, and the Government eagerly caught at this version of the sad affair in preference to the political one, or to attributing the deed to British malice.

Helen, unconscious of the great change awaiting her in life, had accompanied the Conte and Contessa di Malafede to San Carlo, as has been already related. There Sir John Selwood joined them, and in listening to Verdi's beautiful strains, the Princess temporarily forgot the cares and anxieties of her daily existence. The performance, however, was abruptly stopped by the explosion, which shook the building to its foundations,

extinguished the lights, and filled the theatre with a dense smoke. An indescribable panic ensued : terrified cries and shouts resounded through the house, as the occupants of the pit and boxes alike strove to make their escape—a panic which the darkness rendered still more awful. The Conte di Malafede was helpless and stupified by alarm, but Sir John, with true English presence of mind, entreated the ladies to remain quiet, as in endeavouring to escape from an uncertain evil, they might only endanger their lives from the pressure of the crowd. They acquiesced calmly, trusting themselves to the care of Providence, and when after a long delay lights were procured, they were enabled to quit the opera in safety. The streets were filled with persons rushing to and fro ; carriages were driven furiously towards the homes of their owners, and military men were to be seen hastily fastening on their uniforms as they hurried to the palace.

Sir John, placing his friends in their carriage, sent them home, while he remained behind to prosecute his inquiries, as they were anxious to learn the cause of the accident. Following the crowd, he approached the arsenal, at the gates of which all further progress was barred ; but amid the confused reports circulating around, he gathered sufficient information to assure him that a Government steamer had been blown up. This succeeding so quickly to the first explosion, filled him with apprehension, which increased as he recalled to mind Helen's information that her husband was to see his friend Captain Enrico Giulio start that night for Palermo. Hastening to the Marine Barracks at S^{ta} Lucia, which were close at hand, the Baronet sought an interview with the officer on duty, to whom he confided

his fears, entreating permission to enter the military molo. It was granted after some questioning and hesitation, and Sir John, accompanied by a young lieutenant, started on his search. The latter soon prepared him for the worst results, by narrating how he had seen Castelbianco that night at the Caffè d'Europa, in company with Count Giulio and his brother, the captain of the ill-fated vessel, with whom he had also apparently gone on board, intending to return with the Count when he landed.

They found a crowd gathered round some of the wounded survivors who had been saved by the gallant sailors of the "Malacca." His Royal Highness Count d'A—— was there, and he, remarking the Baronet whom he knew, immediately addressed him, and mentioned the fearful death of the Principe di Castelbianco. Surely it was a frightful end! Though feeling neither esteem nor respect for the wretched man, and though the latter had outraged all decency and humanity in the treatment of his wife, yet Sir John shuddered to think of the appalling death which had so suddenly overtaken and sent him unprepared to meet his Maker.

How should he break the tidings to the widow?

The Baronet was roused from these dreary reflections by the landing of some bodies, mangled, blackened, mutilated. Trembling and sick he turned away, following his first impulse, but an officer called him back, saying that his Royal Highness desired to speak with him.

"Sir John Selwood, there is no longer any doubt," said his Royal Highness in English; "look!"

Yes; he recognised the ghastly face which had suffered less than the body. Count Giulio's was more mangled,

but the captain, when discovered, could only be identified by some remnants of his clothes.

God help the poor widows and children ! *

* This fearful catastrophe was not at the time attributed to *accident*, though for the honour of human nature one would wish to believe that no such diabolical means would be chosen to further political ends ! Yet the vicinity of the arsenal to the palace may have been the temptation ; and we have had a Guy Fawkes in our own land as a precedent ! The unhappy captain left a wife and children, from whom he had parted but a short hour or so before. The Neapolitans' conviction that the English planned and executed the foul deed is no invention of ours.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LET us not minister to sickly imaginations by dwelling on these painful scenes. How Sir John Selwood returned to his niece and found the Contessa with her awaiting his arrival; how, with the latter's tender assistance, he cautiously and gently imparted his dreadful tidings to the widow — all this our readers may picture to themselves by the aid of that sad experience which is the lot of most of us poor pilgrims on the earth.

The first shock to Helen when she realised the fact of the Prince's sudden end was almost overpowering; for death cancels and obliterates the greatest injuries received from the deceased, and in no instance is the truth more apparent than in that of a widow's unselfish mourning. All Helen's friends knew that her husband's death was to her a merciful release from a state of cruel bondage; all said that she would soon recover her health and spirits, and learn to be thankful for the change that had befallen her. We may hope for this happy result, because our heroine is still young; and in her parents and child she has much to live for. But our tale draws to a close, and our short remaining space warns us that we must not pursue her fortunes much longer.

At first Helen reproached herself bitterly with having neglected to follow her husband upstairs that night; she

thought that by so doing he might have been prevented from going out to meet his fate ; but her uncle and the Contessa at length reasoned her out of this painful idea. Louisa only regarded Castelbianco as the author of all her friend's sorrows and sufferings, and though herself appalled at his dreadful death, she could not sympathise with Helen's grief. This, however, was sincere, and the widow's great consolation was remembering the parting kiss her husband had given her on that fatal evening.

It may be that Helen was weak and foolish, but, like many another woman, she was grieving for the lost lover of her youth, rather than for the husband of later years.

The funeral took place immediately, with no such great parade and lying in state as had attended that of the old Principessa ; nevertheless, a long train of state carriages, sent by connections and friends, followed the bier, and there were numbers of *pezzenti* headed by their captains in tawdry uniforms and faded red scarfs.

This show was succeeded next day by an onslaught of creditors clamouring for payment, and though Helen was saved nearly all trouble by her kind uncle, yet she was forced to rouse herself ; and this necessity for exertion was healthful to her. Her own fortune could not be touched, as it was settled on her child ; the title went in the male line, and the house was entailed along with it ; but the furniture and private property were all seized, and how little they availed where so much was due !

The Princess soon removed to an hotel on the Chiaja, where, with her uncle and child, she lived in peace, and recruited her strength for her journey home, which was delayed to enable her to bring all business matters to a conclusion, and also till finer weather should set in.

As Minette had no Neapolitan money or possessions to inherit, there was no impediment offered to her accompanying her mother to England. The Duchessa di Villanova, the nearest relation of the Prince, had too many children of her own to wish to start any difficulties about her little niece, for if she were taken away from her Protestant mother, who would support and bring her up? Not Checchina. Therefore the Duchessa contented herself with remonstrating against Helen's removing her child from the influence of the enlightened minds by which she was now surrounded, while Padre Calvi tried to induce the Princess to place Maria at I Miracoli, or in a conventual school during her absence. Minette's safeguard was her present dependence on her mother's fortune, but Helen, growing at last seriously uneasy, hastened her departure in consequence; Jones might be trusted, she well knew, and Minette's attendant was also an Englishwoman; but who could tell what means might be employed by others to kidnap her darling?

On this account the Princess never hinted at her intention to dwell permanently in England—she required change of air and scene, desired to see her family after such a long separation, and therefore availed herself of her uncle's escort to carry out her wishes. It was a sore trial to be obliged to leave her faithful friend the Contessa, who grieved equally at the separation; but Louisa, a few years since, would have felt her coming loneliness more acutely than she did now, when her children engrossed so large a portion of her time and love. She was also more worldly-minded than Helen, and easier suited with companions in foreign society; yet the affection she bore that true-hearted being who had clung to her through good and evil report,

and when all other acquaintances had turned coldly away—no time or circumstances would diminish. It was a sad parting for both, and Sir John Selwood abruptly shortened it, hurrying his niece almost fainting to the carriage.

It was a bright, warm afternoon in the early spring, when Helen, through blinding tears, tried to look her last on the fair city of Naples. She felt then—what she had never owned to herself before—how much she had learnt to love the natural beauties that surrounded her; the blue circling mountains, the glassy bay, the distant islands, and the verdant hills, crested with tall, slender pines sharply defined against the clear sky. The passionate grief and leave-taking of some of her Neapolitan servants affected her painfully, for she then only remembered their kind-heartedness and good nature, and forgot their faults.

She noted all the characteristic street groupings and scenes that had struck her when arriving as a stranger on such another spring day as this, and she fixed them in her memory now that she was leaving them behind. On board the steamer many acquaintances assembled to bid her farewell, and she was grateful for the kindness, but it was a relief to her sorely tried nerves when she found herself alone and perceived that the vessel had fairly started.

Then how memory flew back to that bright, hopeful morning, when, standing by her lover's side with her hand clasped in his, he had pointed out the beauties of the coast, and showed the house that was to be her home! She sat silent, absorbed in these reminiscences, her eyes straining after the receding town, with its castles, and gardens, and green hills, till Marie, prompted by Uncle John (for her mamma looked so tearful and

grave she had feared to approach her unbidden), came and nestled to her side. Ah! Helen, life has still its joys for thee in that fair child!

Slowly the travellers journeyed on their way, lingering—not for the enjoyment of new sights and scenes—but to afford the young widow those frequent rests which her weakened frame so greatly needed. At length, however, the white Dover cliffs appeared through the Channel mists, and the wanderer set foot once more on her dear native land.

Mr. Mowbray stood amid the crowd of spectators assembled to witness the arrival of the steamer, and Helen was clasped in his arms ere she recovered from the surprise of seeing her father so much sooner than she had hoped for. The meeting was full of emotion to both parent and child, but the former felt inexpressible comfort in recovering his daughter—however painful the means—freed from her foreign ties. His grandchild might yet be a blessing to him in his old age, and when, in the course of nature, the old man should be gathered to his fathers, he would enjoy the peaceful reflection that his wide acres and numerous tenants would not pass into strange hands or suffer neglect. It was at the twilight hour, closing a beautiful day, that the travellers were expected at the Priory.

“The sun does not gladden a moment so sweet,
The moon does not shine on so lovely an hour,
As the soft one where light and obscurity meet,
And the world is half veiled by its shadowy power.

When the dew-drops are glittering so silent and fair,
And the waters yet glow with the sun's latest ray,
Heaven breathes its repose in the calm twilight air,
Unknown to the brightness and tumult of day.”

The villagers stood round their several doors to catch

a passing glimpse of their well-loved mistress—buxom lasses whom she remembered as awkward children, and proud young mothers with baby in arms whom she had left just starting into maidenhood. Many a white-haired ancient rested in his arm-chair just within the cottage porch, ready to obey the summons—“Faither! faither! here be the carriage!” Then, rising—with that respect which now belongs to a past generation, and uncovering the silver locks, the aged eyes would strive for a sight of that gentle face which of old had so often cheered his heart. There were no cheers or shoutings, but the silence which prevailed was not wanting in genuine sympathy for the young widow; she felt this instinctively, and was grateful for such considerate kindness. With her arms round the child she held seated on her knees, with her pale face—so touching in its close bordered cap!—looking all excitement, Helen’s tearful eyes eagerly drank in each familiar scene—familiar to her from earliest childhood.

The outer gates stood wide open, and the lodge-keeper dropped a curtsy with a beaming countenance as the carriage turned into the park. They entered the magnificent chestnut avenue now clothed in the fresh verdure of spring; there were the grassy knolls and sloping lawn which Helen loved so well, and, in the distance, though scarcely definable in the gathering shades of evening, she knew where stood the rustic seat under the spreading beech tree, whence she had taken her farewell survey of the house and grounds.

And now the dear old Priory came in sight, and the spire of the beautiful church was also visible among the trees. Helen spoke not, her heart was too full for words, and her companions felt with her that silence was best for all. Marie looked around her at every-

thing, and when a deer frisked lightly by, or a hare was startled from its first sleep, she would fain have called her mother's attention to such unwonted scenes — so strange to the little town-bred, foreign girl; but that mother's eyes were riveted on the Priory entrance where many figures waited on the steps watching the approaching carriage. Now it drew nearer, and Helen recognised the old butler and housekeeper supported by the rest of the household grouped behind; and there was nurse Evans too, longing for a glimpse of her child, and her child's bairn!

But see, the crowd separates respectfully as a lady advances from the hall leaning on an old man's arm; his head is silvered and somewhat bent by age, but the brow is still full of intellect and benevolence, and the countenance beams with a quiet joy as he points out the carriage to his companion, and reverently, with bare head, thanks Heaven that they have both been spared to see this happy meeting! Helen utters a little cry as she perceives her mother and the good rector Mr. Hill, and in another minute the young widow is weeping on that dear mother's bosom —

“In the calm harbour of whose gentle breast
Her tempest-beaten soul may safely rest.”

THE END.

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